

幼馴染み  
お兄ちゃん  
osanaoajimi  
ooyou

2

異世界の  
迷宮都市で  
治癒魔法使い  
やってます



# I Work As A Healer In Another World's Labyrinth City vol.2

by Osananajimi

[Novel Updates](#)

Translation Group: [Yado Inn](#)

Epub: [Trollo WN/LN EPUB](#)

## Chapter 24 – Sleeping

"I want to sleep with Master if possible."

Yuel tugs on the hem of my clothes while facing Eris.

We're currently at Eris' hospital, where we moved our belongings after picking up Yuel. We had dinner at the tavern and informed the barmaster that Eris probably wouldn't show up as often since I transferred the hospital back to her. Then, when we got around to saying, "alright, let's go home and get some sleep"... that's when the trouble began.

"But you know, Yuel-chan. Certainly, nothing may have happened yet, but that doesn't mean it won't ever, right? Besides, Yuel-chan is a girl, so it's improper for you two to keep sleeping in the same bed forever, don't you think?"

When it got late and we said goodnight to Eris, Yuel naturally tried to follow me into the same bedroom afterward. Eris wasn't having any of that.

"Look, we have plenty of beds available, okay?"

Eris tries to persuade Yuel like you would a young child, in a gentle tone of voice. Eris is a strict woman when it comes to things like this. It feels a little lonely, but I guess I won't be sleeping together with Yuel anymore. I mean, it's weird that we have been so far. She may still be young, but sleeping in the same bed with a girl I shouldn't be putting my hands on? That's certainly not proper.

"..."

Hearing Eris' words, Yuel looks down, lost in thought. Then... seemingly understanding the situation, she faces me.

Eventually summer will come around, and it will be difficult to sleep together all the time. It'll be hot, too. Some convenient air-conditioner-like magic tools do exist in this world, but other than the ones that have been successfully mass-produced for heating, lighting, plumbing and whatnot, magic tools are basically unaffordable due to the high price.

Thinking about the future, Yuel should give up and either sleep by herself or

have Eris sleep with her. I nod in response to Yuel to indicate that I agree with Eris. Yuel confirms it and opens her mouth—

"Um, Master promised to embrace me when I grow up, so there isn't a problem."

—and, fidgeting bashfully, she brings that up.

Uh oh.

"...Care to explain?"

Eris cross-examines me in a low voice. I sense some anger in her gaze.

This is awkward. If I bungle this, I don't know what's going to happen to Eris' impression of me. I feel a nervous sweat drip down my cheeks.

No, I need to calm down when I'm in a pinch. First, let me take an objective look at it. How do I look right now to Eris?

Promising a young girl "I'll marry you when you grow up", a sweet young man who's good with kids...

"...To embrace such a little girl... you made a disgusting promise like that?"

Or not. Eris is looking at me like I seduced an innocent young slave girl in order to prey on her sexually. She's treating me like a sex offender.

This is not good. Just when I finally managed to make peace with Eris, I feel like my reputation keeps plummeting.

However, it's true that I did tell Yuel that at one point. "Once you're older, okay?", I promised.

...But that was just so I could get her to sleep on the bed instead of the floor.

"Eris, hold on, that's a misunderstanding."

"Eh...?"

When I deny it, Yuel makes an anguished noise. I look to the side, and Yuel is gazing up at me. A sorrowful expression is spreading across her face.

It's an expression like she trusted me and I betrayed her.

It's impossible. I can't do this. I don't want to see Yuel make a face like that.

"Ahh, well no, not exactly a misunderstanding."

"...So it's true, then?"

When I take back my denial, disdain creeps into Eris' low voice. Her arms are crossed and she's glaring at me. Eris is livid. It's a bit scary.

This is bad. There's nothing I can do.

If I deny Yuel's words then she'll be hurt, but if I confirm them then Eris will detest me. What to do? What can I possibly do?

I might as well honestly admit "Yuel was trying to hold back by sleeping on the floor, so I just said whatever was convenient to get her to use the bed."

No, that's no good. Yuel would go into shock. Although it was just for expediency's sake, throwing away that promise would be awful. There's no way I can cloud over that face full of sunshine.

I need to come up with a better excuse... wait, Yuel's my slave in the first place, so what I do with her shouldn't be any of Eris' concern, should it?

...No no, even if that's the case, I'll be spurned if I tell her "that's none of your business."

This time for sure, Eris would be done with me.

Eris won't want to live with the kind of guy who buys a young girl as a slave and ends up venting his uncontrollable lust on her underdeveloped body. As the one who bought back her hospital, she probably won't kick me out, but there's a high probability she would leave herself. How do I get out of this without making Eris hate me or hurting Yuel...?

"Eris, you're so beautiful."

"I'm not falling for that."

Of course not.

What happened to that pleasant Eris from the time before my lie was revealed? After that dogeza, I tried nonchalantly patting Eris' ass when Yuel wasn't looking, and she hit my arm. I heard that girls become docile when you pet them, but that was a lie apparently.

"Eris, later, let's talk later. There are some complicated circumstances, so I can't explain right now."

I speak while glancing back and forth between Yuel and Eris. Based on Yuel's expression earlier, Eris should be able to guess the reason that I can't explain. But will she? If she doesn't we'll be at an impasse.

Eris sighs at my attitude and looks me straight in the eyes. She seems more astonished than angry. Did she understand? No, now that I think about it, Eris didn't think I would really make a promise like that to Yuel. The subject being what it is, she just wanted an explanation. She should have said that from the beginning.

"Fine... But, Yuel-chan, sleeping together with a man is no good after all. If it's lonely sleeping by yourself, why don't you sleep with me?"

Then the conversation goes back to where it began.

"I-I..."

Yuel is considering Eris' words. She doesn't say she hates the idea.

Looking at Yuel... her fingertips are tightly gripping the hem of my clothes. In her eyes, tears are welling up and about to spill over, and her lips are clenched in a pained frown.

I can pretty much tell what she's thinking. But even so, she doesn't say that she hates the idea.

I'm certain she thinks that if she insists "I want to sleep together with Master" any further, it would be selfish of her. Yuel very rarely mentions her own desires. She properly draws a line between what she considers to be good behavior and bad behavior. I don't know if it's because of her position as a slave or the way she was brought up, but Yuel definitely has some criteria she uses to restrict her own behavior.

She wants to sleep together, but continuing to say so would be crossing that line.

On one hand, she wants to sleep together no matter what. On the other hand, she doesn't want to be called selfish. Those two feelings are at conflict,

and that's most likely why she's making that face and remaining silent.

So... so pitiful...

I feel ashamed for thinking it would be fine if she slept by herself or with Eris.

"Sorry, sorry Yuel-chan. Come sleep with me. We can still sleep together from now on."

"....! Yes! Yes, Master!"

I get down on my knees to match heights with Yuel and hug her. Right, Yuel is still a kid. Of course a child wouldn't want to be separated from their parent. I'm not her father, but I'm the nearest thing to that for Yuel. The feeling is probably similar.

Yuel was being forced to make a tough choice. I gently hold Yuel's head against my chest and slowly brush her soft, silver hair like you would pat a child's back.

I was wrong. Since Yuel can't express her own wishes, I have to do it for her.

"C'mon, Eris..."

While I'm hugging Yuel, I stare into Eris' eyes resolutely. I'm determined to hold my ground now. I can't let Yuel suffer any more than this.

Maybe I'm spoiling Yuel too much, but I don't want to see that mournful face anymore. I want Yuel to be able to smile.

"Fine, I understand. But... in that case, I'll be joining you."

It turns out she didn't mean that we would all share the same bed.

Now there are two beds laid out in this 8-[tatami](#) room. Yuel and I will be sleeping on one side, and Eris on the other.

To be fair, I didn't expect Eris to even go this far. She's quite the prim-and-proper type. It might be thanks to Yuel becoming good friends with her. Our beds are separated, so you can't exactly call it "sleeping together", but just sleeping in the same room with me is major progress.

If we're together in the same room, I could slip into Eris' bed late at night when I come back half-asleep from the restroom, or pass out onto her when I

get drunk.

This time I'll be careful not to overdo it.



## Chapter 25 – Bathing

Yuel stabs a Goblin in the throat. The Goblin collapses and vanishes into particles of light.

We're on the 3rd floor of the labyrinth. After buying back the hospital yesterday, we're in the labyrinth to earn money. Why are we still doing that now that we have the hospital? Because no customers are coming.

From morning till noon, I waited for patients at the hospital, but not a single person showed up.

Yep, not a single one.

It's not like I can't understand why. The fact that we raised our treatment prices back to market value, and that it was temporarily closed, probably caused it. The customers that previously went out of their way for the low prices no longer have any reason to, and the regular customers have left due to the closure. We may have raised the prices, but only to the market value. So customers living in the neighborhood might return eventually, but that could take some time. We have to make it appear like it's not going out of business.

Eris repaid her debt so it's not like we desperately need to earn money, but with so few patients there's no point in me being there. It should be fine to leave all the hospital-related matters to Eris for a while.

Accordingly, Yuel and I are exploring the labyrinth together. In the labyrinth, we can earn a steady income without relying on customers. Eventually, if we can organize a Huge Slime hunt with Eight and Geyser, it should be more profitable. Besides, if the hospital never gets more patients, I'll end up paying for Eris' living expenses via the labyrinth. Since she has a strong sense of responsibility, she'll most likely feel obligated to pay me back somehow. When that time comes I'll absolutely request for her to do so with her body.

And that's why Yuel and I are hunting Goblins. Since it was already afternoon when we entered the labyrinth, I don't plan to go as far as the 7th floor today. Earn a little, praise Yuel a lot, drink at the tavern a little, observe the miniskirt waitress a lot, then head back to the hospital. That's the kind of feeling I'm

going with.

I take a skewer out of my item box and munch on it as we stroll through the labyrinth.

Yuel's movements have become increasingly sharp lately. I wonder if it's because her physical condition has improved now that her nutritional balance is better? Yuel continues to dispatch the Goblins, and not even a single monster makes it past her in my direction. The difficulty level of the 3rd floor is like taking a walk at this point.

I pet Yuel's head when she runs over with the drops. Yuel bashfully accepts my hand as it strokes her head.

Speaking of petting, I had nothing to do while I was waiting for patients at the hospital, so I amused myself by petting Yuel over and over while showering her with compliments. Eris was watching with a delicate expression. If I'm too affectionate with Yuel when we're at the hospital, Eris might label me as a lolicon. So in order to have some skinship with Yuel without being judged, labyrinth exploration time is still necessary.

"Master, there's something up ahead."

While I'm thinking about such things, Yuel suddenly speaks up.

"What is it?"

"Umm, in the distance... it looks like a box."

Box. Box... treasure chest.

So it's finally arrived? How many weeks has it been since I first entered the labyrinth? Finally, my time has come!

Treasure chests. There are various theories, such as they're bait that the labyrinth produces in order to lure people in, or a result of the labyrinth's magic accumulating within the possessions of bygone adventurers, but they usually contain valuable gems, catalysts, magic tools and so on. Of course the contents vary widely, but among them is a crystal that shatters in your stead when you receive a fatal attack, a magic tool that draws in mana from the air to produce an infinite supply of water, and other magic tools that are worth enough money

to fill an entire house and then some. They're synonymous with getting rich quick.

I look in the direction that Yuel's pointing, and there's definitely something there that resembles a box.

As I approach, the labyrinth's stone floor rises unnaturally and forms the shape of a box. Its structure is simple, and it doesn't seem to require a key. Many games include monsters that mimic chests or chests with traps inside, but I haven't heard of anything like that at the adventurer's guild.

With a heart full of expectation, I carefully open the lid...

"...A pistol?"

There's a 20cm-long pistol-shaped object inside. No, it's a bit different from a pistol. It's shaped like the letter L and made out of some sort of glossy, inorganic material.

"Piss toll...? Master, do you know what it is?"

Looking at the magic tool in my hand, Yuel questions me eagerly.

This magic tool. It looks a lot like a pistol, but it's not one. On top of it having no trigger or hammer mechanism, the form is slightly rounder. Of course, I don't have any idea what this actually is, but—

"For something like this, I can tell with just a glance."

"...! Amazing, Master is incredible!"

Yuel is innocently delighted upon hearing my words. I can feel a tinge of reverence in her eyes.

That's right, I'm a brilliant master who knows everything. At least, in front of Yuel.

It's not entirely a lie this time. I have my Appraisal skill. It should turn this lie into the truth.

"Yuel, this magic tool is..."

Then, I activate Appraisal.

"...It's a squirt gun, ain't it?"

I point the muzzle at a Goblin and fill the tool with mana. A stream of comfortably warm water raises wisps of steam as it arcs gently toward its target. The warm water makes a splashing sound as it washes the dirt off the Goblin's body.

The muzzle velocity of the warm water is about the same as a fully-open faucet. Looks like it feels pretty good for the Goblin, too.

"It's useless after all, huh. I was hoping maybe something like boiling water or a waterjet cutter would come out, though..."

This magic tool only spits out water when you fill it with mana, apparently.

It seems that the temperature of the water can be adjusted to some extent, by about 50 degrees as far as I can tell with my hand. The force with which it comes out is the same as a fully-open water faucet. As a result of various tests, putting in more mana doesn't seem to increase the temperature or the force. In other words...

"A hot water dispenser?"

It's not useful for offense in any way.

"Diss pen sir?"

Yuel asks as she finishes slitting the now-clean Goblin's throat.

"Umm, it's a magic tool you put in a bath."

We visit the tavern then return to the hospital. That's right, Eris' hospital doesn't have a hot water source. I would've rather obtained a magic tool that allows me to fight, but this could be useful in its own way.

I'll use this magic tool to heat the bath.

Magic tools from the labyrinth are supplied with mana directly by their user, and there are many different types of magic that they can invoke. Compared to the artificial magic tools that use processed magic stones as fuel, the ones from the labyrinth are more compatible with someone who has a lot of mana like me. It might be a bit hard to use for Eris with her average level of mana, but my

supply is limitless. I'll have Eris pay the toll afterwards for using the hot water.

Then when I'm about to jump into the bath... naturally, a problem arises.

"I-If possible I want to go in together with Master."

When I go to enter the bath and Yuel casually follows behind me, Eris objects. I get a feeling of déjà vu.

"Yuel-chan, bath time is no good either. That man sexually harasses at the slightest opportunity, he's a hopeless man who creates opportunities even if you don't give him any. Just sleeping together is bad enough, but getting into the bath together, naked, is absolutely unthinkable."

So far Eris has never spoken ill of me in front of Yuel, but she's making an exception now. With her strong sense of ethics, there's no way Eris will allow a man and a young girl to enter the bath together. Well, it's not like I haven't thought that it's getting to the point where we shouldn't bathe together. I just haven't said "let's go in separately" because she'll get that look in her eyes, like an abandoned puppy.

"M-Master is not that type of person!"

Master is that type of person. I can't particularly deny it.

But Yuel rejects Eris' allegations. Her tone is strong, and she's trembling slightly. It's obvious that she's truly upset about her master being insulted.

Seeing the state that Yuel is in, Eris glowers at me.

She's unable to crush Yuel's misguided feelings of respect for her master, yet unable to allow such an indecent activity to occur. That's why Eris is glaring at me for continuing to play the part of the ideal master in front of Yuel. So that's how it is.

It can't be helped. I'll offer her some timely assistance.

"Everything will be settled if Eris joins us."

"Don't screw with me."

Of course not.

"I-It was just a joke. Yuel and I will both wear towels. Look, in that case it



wouldn't matter, right?"



We'll hide behind towels. That much should be good enough to placate Yuel and just barely permissible enough for Eris.

"Well, in that case..."

Eris begrudgingly assents. She clearly doesn't want to, but she would hate for it to turn into a rehash of yesterday's argument. I have a feeling that Eris is just as overprotective of Yuel as I am, in different ways.

We leave the bath without anything special happening like Yuel bumping into me and having her towel accidentally fall apart.

"Ah, Yuel, could you let Eris know that the bath is open?"

"Yes, Master!"

After I send Yuel to call Eris over, I return to the bathroom.

Then, I retrieve a large spider corpse from my item box. The kind you often find in the back of a cupboard.

I hide it behind the soap. In a place where you'll end up touching it when you reach over. If someone who hates spiders reaches for the soap and screams upon suddenly feeling a spider, the other residents would surely be concerned for them.

...By the way, Eris hates spiders.

With a heart full of expectation, I leave the bathroom.

## Chapter 26 – Cutoff

A few days have passed.

The number of customers at Eris' hospital still hasn't increased. It's not zero anymore, but raising the fees back to market price seems to have had a pretty severe impact. Only one or two patients show up.

Eris would prefer for me to work at the hospital too, but under these conditions she can't even afford to pay me what I was making previously. Although on occasion I received independent "physical payment" for the share of the treatment that I helped with.

Besides, right now I have a job that's overwhelmingly more profitable than the hospital.

That's right, Huge Slime subjugation. For the past few days, I've been meeting up with Eight, Geyser, and the adventurers I treated from the last time, and hunting nothing but the Huge Slime. Even today we've been doing the same thing. For some reason our luck is better than usual, and we're able to obtain many rare drops. It's somewhat fewer compared to when I was taking back Eris' hospital, but even so it's a huge windfall for the party as a whole.

"We made out like bandits today, oi!"

Geyser cheerfully smacks my shoulder as we walk through the labyrinth.

"Yeah, 5 Slime Drops... even after dividing it up that's at least 100,000 Zeni each. Awesome, this is awesome!"

On the other side of Geyser, Eight calculates the profits from today's hunt.

There's some danger involved when hunting the Huge Slime. You can't leave the boss room until the boss is defeated, and on top of that there's the risk of getting severely injured if you don't handle it well. But that's exactly what makes it profitable. In terms of Japanese currency, 100,000 Zeni is about a million yen. That's a huge sum of money for an adventurer who's barely scraping by.

Indeed, I've obtained a huge pile of money.

Yet the lifestyle I'm currently living doesn't require much money. As far as clothing, I always wear the same type of habit. For food, I can eat as much as I want and not spend more than 500 Zeni per day, and on top of that Eris has been preparing portions for me and Yuel lately. And for shelter, we live at the hospital, so there are no expenses at all in that column.

There's no need for me to set aside funds in case of illness or injury, since I can maintain my good health with healing magic.

In short, that means that I can do whatever I want with this huge pile of money. I can use it however I like, and it won't matter.

So why don't I have a little fun with it?

I've been trying my hardest. Although that time I went looking for Yuel was my mistake, I desperately plunged through the labyrinth while braving injury. I also recovered Eris' hospital by making clever use of my healing magic.

Wouldn't you say it's about time for some recreation?

I've made all the necessary arrangements to prepare for this day. When I head to the tavern after this, the barmaster will tell Yuel, "we're short-handed, so we'd really like you to help out". They're not actually understaffed, but that's the arrangement. Once Yuel starts working, I'll come up with a suitable excuse and leave. Then I'll thoroughly enjoy myself at an adult establishment, properly wash off all the evidence, and head back to pick up Yuel. This way, Yuel will be none the wiser. After that, we'll return to the hospital as if I'd been with Yuel the whole time, and Eris won't find out either. It's a perfect plan.

As I'm elaborating on my fantasies—

"Oi oi, can you believe it, 100,000 Zeni! Awright, wanna hit up the flower shop? You coming too, Shiki? We got the place rented out."

—Geyser spouts that out while twisting his fingers into

[that shape](#) and makes a big grin.

Apparently Geyser was thinking along the same lines.

Yuel's too young to understand this, but "flower shop" is a euphemism for a brothel. Intentionally speaking in code must be Geyser's way of being

considerate around Yuel.

.....But it backfires.

"Renting out a flower shop, Master? What will you do there?"

Yuel asks me with bright, sparkling eyes. On the contrary, it would seem she's very interested in the term "flower shop".

Of course the idea of renting out a flower shop wouldn't make any sense if you didn't know the meaning behind it. Right now, is Yuel's imagination filled with thoughts of her master surrounded by flowers, having a tea party with a bunch of gruff adventurers? I don't understand why that would make her eyes sparkle like that though.

"Welll, you see..."

I can't exactly tell her what we're up to. I'd come up with a suitable deception, but nothing good comes to mind. Yuel might not realize it, but she's tugging on my clothes again in search of a response... she's already completely curious about it.

Does she like flowers? She probably likes them. Yuel is a dark elf, and elves have their roots as people of the forest. She must be fond of pretty things like flowers.

I stare at Yuel in her restless excitement. On either side of her head, those cute elf ears are wagging too.

Not good. This is not good. Her eyes are full of expectation now. If I ditch Yuel at the tavern after this, just how devastated is she going to be?

No, even if it didn't sadden her, Yuel could still propagate the problem. Like if she asked Eris, "Master said they rented out a flower shop, do you know what they're doing?" or something. Eris' opinion of me would hit rock bottom. We're not in the kind of relationship where I could be blamed for going to an adult establishment, but Eris would surely despise me for doing it. If that happens, she wouldn't let me get away with the tiniest bit of sexual harassment. I can't leave any doubts in Yuel's mind.

I'm sure that Yuel will still have questions if I take her to the tavern and leave



by myself. "What might master be doing right now", *etc.*

If it was just wondering what I'm up to, that would be fine. But it's too late. Since she heard our earlier conversation, Yuel will be thinking "Master is doing something at the flower shop they rented out".

And if one day Yuel came to know the meaning behind the term "flower shop"... that angelic smile she's always giving me would turn into a look of scorn...

...

"...Geyser, I'm not going there. Yuel, would you like to go buy flowers with me later?"

After struggling through that exchange, I make it to the adventurer's guild for a different kind of exchange. However—

"I'm terribly sorry. After this transaction, we will be suspending the purchase of Slime Drops."

—The dog-eared receptionist girl explains and bows her head in apology.

"O-Oi, you gotta be kidding."

"S-Suspending purchase? What do you mean!?"

Eight's group starts kicking up a stir at the receptionist girl's announcement. Now that I think about it, when I was buying back Eris' hospital, the face of the receptionist girl who handled the exchanges was twitching. I suspected the price would fall eventually, but for them to suddenly stop buying it outright, I wonder what's going on?

"U-Ummm, you see, Slime Drops are..."

According to the receptionist girl, Slime Drop is an ingredient for a specific medicine that's used to treat an endemic disease that occurs rarely in this region. The local lord had been purchasing them from the guild as an emergency stockpile, but recently he's collected a sufficient number of them, so he stopped buying them. Since the disease is endemic, there's not much demand for the medicine outside of this region, plus it's not being consumed unless there's an outbreak. Having said that, if the exchange price is low then

the supply will dry up, so the guild has been maintaining the price so that adventurers will still come to sell them occasionally.

That's the situation, but lately the supply has mysteriously skyrocketed, so they had to hastily suspend purchases.

To sum it up in a single word, oversupply.

I thought that Huge Slime could provide for me in order to live out the rest of my days in comfort, but I guess the story's not that simple.

At the flower shop, I stuff the large quantity of flowers I bought into my item box and head back to the hospital. Yuel was cocking her head to the side slightly in confusion, but in the end I placed a garland atop her head and she left the store smiling. Maybe she thought that buying a lot of flowers is what "renting out a flower shop" means? ...It seems I'll need to correct her later somehow.

When we get back to the hospital, Eris asks me to hold the fort while she goes shopping for our evening meal. Eris has been taking care of lots of different household chores. I'll pet her to show my appreciation.

I spruce up the place with the bundles of flowers I ended up buying, then sit Yuel on my knee and start adorning her hair with flowers while I wait for patients.

At which point a customer finally arrives.

"Ah, ahh! You really were here!"

Or not a customer. The one who's here for treatment is the red-headed adventurer, Ruruka. When she sees me with Yuel on my knee, she makes a subtle face. She doesn't say anything, though.

Oh right, the last time we met was when I was rubbing Ruruka's breasts and we convinced Yuel it was a misunderstanding, huh. It wasn't a misunderstanding though.

...Yuel hasn't realized the truth about that time, has she? With a little apprehension, I take a peek at the side of her face as she sits atop my knee.

She seems pleased with the garland on her head. She bashfully laughs "ehehe" as she feels the flowers. I was worried that she realized it was a lie

after some time had passed, but she doesn't show any concern.

"Well, if it isn't Ruruka. What seems to be the problem?"

"You haven't been at the tavern much lately, I was looking for you y'know? I never expected you to come back to Eris' place, though. ...Did you two make up?"

So she was looking for me. Now that I think about it, I never told Ruruka that I returned to the hospital. Well, we don't have any contact outside of meeting at the tavern by chance so it's not like there was anything I could have done about it.

"Yeah. So what brings you here today, don't you need any treatment?"

To suddenly come looking for me, I figured she was hurt, but apparently not. No matter how you look at it, she seems perfectly healthy.

"Ahaha, you should know already. C'mon, it's *that*, y'know, *that*."

"*That*?"

What, letting me rub her breasts? But Yuel is here right now, so I'd rather wait until the next opportunity. If a certain thing happens while Yuel is on my lap, I won't be able to look her in the eyes anymore.

"Ehehe. I heard you were making a killing from the Huge Slime? Won'tcha lemme in on a piece of that?"



Ruruka grins as she solicits me. It's a nice, flirtatious smile. I see, so that's what it was. But too bad, her timing is off.

"Ah, about that, they just stopped buying Slime Drops today. I'm not doing any more Huge Slime hunts. It's a shame, huh."

It's a shame for me too. If they hadn't suspended purchases, I would've been able to set suitable conditions for joining the Huge Slime hunt. If a price cut on healing magic is worth a breast massage, just how far would a boss hunt with tens of thousands of Zeni in profit have gotten me? I'm awfully curious.

"E-Eeehh!? N-No way, that can't be true? I-I even tried so hard to persuade Fran... and bought a new weapon..."

"It's true. Bad luck, huh."

"Hahhh... now what should I do... maybe I'll take that request from the board..."

"The request board? Don't those have pretty poor rewards?"

The request board. A bulletin board at the entrance of the adventurer's guild, where commission notices are displayed. However, just because it's in the adventurer's guild doesn't necessarily mean the guild is involved. Many of them are individual requests written by townspeople, just pieces of paper stuck to the board with a contact address and reward amount listed.

And the remuneration is generally poor. Important jobs like monster extermination along the highways and bandit subjugation are the duty of the knights that guard the city, so not many ever make it down to adventurers. The ones that do reach adventurers are mostly small-scale, personal requests like guarding a field or exterminating pests.

I don't know how far Ruruka's party has made it into the labyrinth, but I think exploring the labyrinth would typically be more profitable.

"Umm, apparently there have been more monsters outside of town for some reason y'know? And there's an unusual request from the knight brigade. Seems unexpectedly lucrative. It's just small fry like goblins, but supposedly the knights are giving a nice reward for subjugation."

Ordinarily, the knights bear the burden of defending this city. The fundamental duties of the knights are to patrol the highway, drive off bandits, and periodically thin the number of monsters in the nearby forest and



mountains. However, this area doesn't usually have many monsters appear. There haven't been any wars lately either, so I heard that the number of knights isn't that high. Perhaps they weren't able to handle a sudden explosion in the monster population.

"Huh. But, aren't there dangerous monsters outside the town? Will it be alright?"

The knights act as a group, and what's more they all meet a certain standard of ability. If a fairly strong monster appeared, they shouldn't have any problem dealing with it.

Besides, adventurers are comparatively fewer in number, and their proficiency varies widely. Unlike in the labyrinth, there's a possibility of suddenly running into a powerful monster outside the town. If your party encounters a monster that's beyond your ability, you're out.

"It's 'cause there aren't many strong monsters around here. I've subjugated monsters plenty of times outside of the labyrinth, so I think it'll be fine?"

"Well, be careful."

"...By the way, what's with those flowers? Not just the ones on Yuel's head, they're all over the place."

Ruruka asks while looking at the garland on Yuel's head. She's wondering about it after all.

"Yeah, these are..."

What should I do? I can't answer poorly. Yuel is here and we went to buy them together. If I say something vague, Yuel won't be comfortable with it.

While I'm worrying about it—

"It's because he rented out a flower shop! Right, Master?"

Yuel answers with a smile.

## Chapter 27 – Teeth

"...Shiki, you went? Not to mention, rented it out? B-By yourself?"

I was gonna go to a brothel, but I didn't. I was gonna rent it out, but I didn't. I was considering using all of my 100,000 Zeni, but I only considered it. I still haven't done it. It was only intent. I'm innocent.

"T-That's, look, well, how do I say this..."

I glance at the back of Yuel's head as she's sitting on my knee, then back to Ruruka. Making eye contact. Now's not a good time for this conversation. I can't discuss the details in front of Yuel.

Geyser invited me to a brothel. However, I can't let Yuel find out about that. Since Yuel's master isn't the kind of person who would buy women with money. I'm an honest, noble, kind master. I wouldn't be invited to a brothel and I wouldn't consider going. I don't even poop.

If it wasn't like that, Yuel wouldn't look at me with that reverent glimmer in her eyes. Yuel's admiration is one of my greatest pleasures right now. As it is, Eris' attitude has been getting more severe lately. I couldn't handle not having Yuel's smile to heal me. I couldn't handle being unable to bask in her reverent gaze. That's why I can't allow Yuel's image of me as her ideal master to be shattered.

Ruruka nods slowly at my eye contact. Does she understand? Ruruka has good judgment. I'm sure she understands.

"I-I get it. Yeah, Shiki... you're a man, right? You get that urge now and then. I understand, it can't be helped."

She doesn't understand at all.

Ruruka blushes and repeatedly presses her fingers together as her eyes dart around the room. Our eyes suddenly meet, and she immediately looks away. This is hopeless.

"You don't understand! You don't understand at all!"

"N-No, I get it. I totally understand. Men get, uh, b-backed up... and it makes them want to go do that kinda stuff, I get it."

I appreciate your understanding. But that's not it. You're always pushing me to rub your breasts, so why are you only reacting like that now? Suddenly you're pure and innocent?

I guess the only upside is that she's being careful to not use any definitive terms that Yuel would understand. Unable to follow the flow of the conversation, Yuel is tilting her head as if she's pondering something. I'll have to come up with a suitable pretense for her later.

All that's left now is to clear up Ruruka's misunderstanding...

"I'm telling you you're wrong. Later, alright, let's talk later!"

"N-Nah, it's fine, you don't have to mislead me. I don't mind that sort of thing!"

I appreciate you not minding it. But I'm not misleading you. I never went to a brothel to begin with. I was ready to rent it out and try out some [magistrate play](#), but I didn't go.

Now what? I have to clear up this misunderstanding somehow. Wait, she did say she isn't bothered by it, so maybe it's not necessary to clear it up in the first place. Although if I leave it like this, in Ruruka's head I'll be a man who uses brothels. Moreover, she'll think of me as the kind of hopeless guy who'd blow a fortune on renting out a whorehouse for a night of depravity. In reality I am such a person, but I'm not okay with having other people see me that way.

I have to set her straight after all. As I'm thinking about it—

"U-Ummm, it's too bad about the Huge Slime, but invite me if any other tasty opportunities pop up, okay? I-I'll come again."

—Since Ruruka seems like she's getting ready to leave, I try to get up from my chair. But I can't get up right away since Yuel is riding on my knee.

"W-Wait a minute..."

I can only watch on as Ruruka makes her escape.

After Ruruka leaves, Yuel starts to ask things like “Men get backed up? What exactly gets backed up?”, so I pat her head and try to convince her to keep the flower shop talk a secret, at which point Eris gets back from shopping.

And then it’s time for dinner. The food that Eris made is laid out on the table.

"Hey Eris, doesn't it seem like my stew has less meat in it?"

Eris sulks at me from across the table.

"Who knows, maybe you're just imagining it?"

It seems like Eris’ attitude has become rather prickly lately. Even though she was so incredibly soft-hearted right after I bought back her hospital. I feel like her mood got worse right after that time she let out a shriek in the bathroom and I came running to see what was wrong. Apparently a spider corpse somehow showed up in the bathroom, and she suspects that I’m the culprit. The nerve of that girl! What would I do if that was a false accusation?

Well, setting aside whether or not I was falsely accused, Eris’ mood has been terrible recently. I need to lift her spirits to some degree or we’re going to end up repeating the same breakdown all over again.

That’s why—

"Eris, you truly are beautiful. And you have such nice style, surely you’re the ideal woman."

—I’m flattering Eris. She’s bothered by my relationships with women, so for now it’s a good idea to praise her. I’m doing it entirely out of self-interest, but I’m not particularly lying about her. Flattering Eris shouldn’t make her mood any worse, at least.

"...And that’s why you peeped in the bath?"

There’s a hint of irritation in her sullen voice. ...Seems like Eris really holds a grudge. She’s not going to forgive me that easily. At the very least, I don’t get the impression that telling her “because it’s you” in a sultry tone would go over well.

Besides, Yuel is right here. It’ll be troublesome if I don’t deny the rumor that I peeped on Eris in the bath.

"It's not like I was peeping, right? When I heard you scream I thought something had happened, that's all."

When I say that, Eris just silently glares at me like she's looking at a pile of trash. Even now she's giving me a reproachful expression. She's not buying it, huh? Maybe my daily conduct has been too reprehensible. I'd better change the subject.

"O-Oh... that's right, the meat in this stew... it's Fang Rabbit, right? It's amazing that you were able to make that stringy meat so tender, Eris. It just melts in your mouth, it's incredibly delicious."

"That's just chicken."

"...Mmm, nah, be that as it may, you really are amazing to be able to make such delicious cuisine. The flavor isn't too heavy or too light, it's perfectly balanced. I can tell that you keep the diner in mind. I always appreciate it. I'm sure you'll make a great wife someday."

Eris makes a pouty face and doesn't reply, but she doesn't lash back or anything either. This is the right flow. If I keep up the compliments, she might just tell me "oh well, it can't be helped". For now, let's try another push.

"M-Master, I helped out too!"

As I'm piling compliments on Eris, Yuel interjects.

"Yuel will make a good wife someday too."

"...!"

When I say that, Yuel's face turns red and she lowers her head in embarrassment. Unlike Eris, her reaction is meek and lovable. It's so cute that I unconsciously start petting her head, but then Yuel counters by nuzzling her head against my hand. Adorable. Praise is super effective with Yuel. Part of me wants to praise her more... but my priority right now is to improve Eris' mood.

"Oh right, Eris, between the hospital job and the housework, aren't you sore? Want me to give you a massage later?"

"That won't be necessary."

She replies immediately. I wonder why? I thought we had a good feeling

going. What other ways do I have to improve Eris' mood...?

"Ah, that's right, the flowers. I bought these. Aren't they pretty?"

When I pull out a bouquet from my item box, Eris' eyes widen in surprise.

"Even the hallway is decorated. You sure bought a lot of them."

As Eris exclaims in amazement, the smile that breaks out across her cheeks doesn't escape my notice.

After dinner, Yuel and I enter the bath. Eris switches with us once we leave, but this time I don't plant any spiders for her to find. I can't sexually harass Eris for a while. I've studied the last time, when I got kicked out, in depth. Ascertaining just how far I can go with the sexual harassment means sexually harassing her to the point that it's no longer okay.

After bathing, all that's left is to go to bed. I'll get my toothbrush from my item box and brush my teeth. There are proper toothbrushes in this world, and toothpaste too. Of course the quality isn't as high compared to modern Japan, though.

I go to sit on the living room sofa like always and scrub away at my teeth, when—

"Does Master like people who are good at cooking?"

—Yuel, who has already finished brushing her teeth, asks me that. Where did that come from? Ah, it's because I was raving over Eris' cooking.

Which option should I go with? If I had to choose between good at cooking or bad at it, of course I'd prefer good. I have no idea how good Yuel's culinary skills are, but sure, it's better to have them than not. Besides, if I tell her yes, she'll become motivated to tackle cooking. I nod and keep brushing my teeth.

"I thought so... also, um, earlier Eris said that Master... peeped at her in the bath, is that true? Does Master prefer someone with big breasts like Eris-san?"

The toothbrush snaps in my grasp.

"No, Yuel. That's not right. I heard Eris scream, so I went to see what happened out of concern. I wasn't peeping, I was just worried that something happened to her. Got it? I'll say it again, I was worried about Eris, so I only went

to make sure she was okay. I was absolutely not peeping. It was an act of god, an unfortunate accident. Also, and this has nothing to do with it, but you'll get bigger too eventually so don't worry about it."

Yuel nods slowly, muttering "bigger...", and starts patting her chest. Apparently that's where her thoughts have shifted. For a moment I thought she still had concerns about my behavior, but that was probably a result of her complex about Eris' mammoth mammaries. I shudder. I thought my lie had been exposed.

Yuel continues to dab at her chest. It's certainly no surprise that she'd develop an inferiority complex from looking at Eris' huge knockers every day. But I'm ending this conversation here. I have a feeling it could go in an unsavory direction if it continues.

Then, when I'm about to go back to brushing, I notice it.

"The toothbrush..."

Near the head, it's cleanly broken into two pieces.

The toothbrush handle is made of wood. It's weak enough that squeezing it a bit with an adult's grip could snap it.

I fish around in my item box... but there's no replacement. Oh yeah, I inadvertently stepped on it earlier and broke it.

While I'm figuring out what to do, I notice Yuel staring intently at her own brush in her hand. I'm not sure what she's thinking about, but just to make sure, I'll gently reprimand her.

"It's not good to borrow someone else's toothbrush, okay."

There's no helping it. I'm a little annoyed at having to stop halfway, but I'll go buy another toothbrush in the morning and finish then. As I make my decision, Yuel speaks up.

"Master."

Yuel is looking at me. I didn't notice her pick it up, but she's holding the head of my broken toothbrush in her hand. There's already toothpaste on it. She grins at me and speaks.

"I will help."

Holding the 2-3cm toothbrush head in her hand, she's going to help.

I realize what she means by that. Yuel must be planning to brush my teeth using that tiny brush head. That might just work for the front teeth, but what about the molars? Is she really planning to stick that brush into my mouth with her fingers? No, even for Yuel, doing such a thing would be totally im...aginable. If it's Yuel, she might just do it.

This can't possibly end well. This has to stop. I have to stop her.

"Yuel, I'll make do with just toothpaste today, so leave it at that", is what I try to say.

But that doesn't happen. The second I open my mouth— Yuel slips her fingers inside. Unable to close my mouth, only unintelligible noises escape my throat.

Yuel grins at me with an expression that merely says "leave it to me", and proceeds to brush my teeth.

Let's look at this situation objectively.

I have no toothbrush, so a young slave girl is polishing my teeth with her fingers.

Allowing this to continue is out of the question.

I need to stop her. I need to stop her, but Yuel's fingers are already inside my mouth. If I try to speak to her to convince her to stop, I might end up biting down on Yuel's slender fingers. I can't possibly do that.

While I'm still worrying about what to do, Yuel gently presses the brush against my teeth and rubs her fingers along my gum line as if to massage it, scraping against the inside of my cheek. Yuel stares into my open mouth in order to concentrate as she brushes. She's so close that our faces could easily touch if I cough. Yuel's balmy breath hits the nape of my neck. Maybe it's because she just took a bath, but the aroma of soap wafts up with every movement she makes.

As I thought, it's impossible. This is impossible. As I jerk my face back, Yuel presses on my shoulder—



—and pushes me down towards the back of the sofa. I've fallen deep into the sofa, and Yuel is looking down on me from above, that kind of position. ... Maybe the angle was bad, and it was hard to see into my mouth. That's what I'd like to believe.

Gazing so deep as if to be swallowed up by my mouth, Yuel continues to move her fingers. Incisors, canines, molars, then behind the teeth and the gaps... I can feel her carefully and diligently taking her time to polish up my chompers.

"Nhh..."



Then, perhaps because it's still hard to see inside my mouth, Yuel shifts her posture... to one where she's straddling my hips. I'm sure that getting into a proper sitting position makes it easier, but why did it have to be this position? Even so, it still seems to be hard for her to see, and she keeps adjusting her position slightly as she brushes the inside of my mouth.

Brush, brush. Splash, splash. And then there's the faint sound of Yuel's breath.

Yuel continues brushing. She suddenly starts restlessly moving her thighs and adjusting her position frequently, but she's only brushing my teeth.

So why is that redness spreading from her face to her ears?

No, it's not like I don't understand. She might be brushing my teeth, but when you think about it, it's like I'm constantly kissing her fingers. Yuel probably noticed that while she was in the middle of brushing. That might be why she got all worked up on her own.

All of a sudden, Yuel stops moving her hand, and strokes my lips. She rubs them over and over. Her fingers creep across my lips.

I guess you're done brushing my teeth. If you're done I'd like you to get off me. I'm no lolicon, but if you stroke my lips as you stare so closely at me, eventually

*that* might get like *that*

. And right now Yuel is thoroughly aroused. If it gets like *that*, it'll probably be devoured.

Abruptly, Yuel tears her gaze away from my mouth and raises it up. When our eyes meet, her body trembles.

"M-Master... Masterrr..."

Yuel is already flushed from ear to ear, and her wide eyes are watching me. Brushing my teeth must have required a lot of concentration, since she's panting. She suddenly takes her free hand and lovingly caresses my cheek.

Yuel and I remain like that, our eyes locked. Five or six seconds pass, and Yuel's throat makes a big gulp.

...I'm gonna be devoured.

I need to tear her off of me. But if I shove Yuel away with all my might here... she'll probably take that as a sign of rejection. From Yuel's perspective, she's just devotedly taking care of her master's oral hygiene, and I forcefully reject her? Just how hurt would she feel if I did that?

While I'm still lost and unable to act, Yuel gazes intently at my face and rubs my lips and cheeks with her hands.

Pulling Yuel off of me would hurt her. But if I don't do something, at this rate

I'll be defiled. What do I do? What can I possibly d...!?

The door to the living room flings open.

"What are you two doing...?"

Eris, still dripping wet and drying herself with a towel after leaving the bath, is staring at us in astonishment. Her mood seems to have improved a bit. She was most likely pleased with the rose-like flower petals I left floating in the bathwater.

When Yuel sees Eris, she reluctantly runs her hand across my lips one last time as she hops off of me.

"A-All done, Master."

Yuel says with regret, as she stashes my broken toothbrush in her item box.

## Chapter 28 – Giving Treatment

"Maaan, it was incredible y'know? The monsters were like 2 meters tall, as big as a bear. And I slashed them like *zubaaa*, right? Yeah, it's only a little but this sword has some adamantite in it. I bought it not long ago with the money I saved up."

A few days ago, having missed out on the Huge Slime hunts, Ruruka was grumbling about taking on a monster subjugation request from the knight brigade. She came back around to the hospital just now; apparently she completed it.

"Well, they were surrounding us, but I only got a few scrapes. I was thinking that being the only tank for a party sure is tough."

As Ruruka says that, she glances at Yuel, who's sitting next to me. What's with that look? I'd like you to stop looking at Yuel with those greedy eyes.

"I'm not giving you Yuel... wait, what? Hold on. Didn't you tell me there weren't many dangerous monsters near the city? Why were you fighting monsters like that?"

I have a feeling Ruruka said earlier that there weren't any dangerous monsters on the outskirts of town. But now she's saying that she fought against 2-meter-tall monsters, and moreover that they had her surrounded.

"A-Ahaha, well, you see... at first we were just going to hunt small fry like goblins and kobolds on the outskirts of the forest, but since the reward from the knight brigade was so high, there was a lot of competition from other adventurers. It wouldn't have been worth it, so we went a little deeper into the forest. Then it started to rain and some fog rolled in, and so we kinda got lost and ended up deep inside the forest. The fog cleared up pretty quickly so it turned out okay, but it was nearly a disaster."

Ruruka laughs as she says such a thing. To laugh about flirting with disaster in a forest where monsters appear, is she brave or is she just carefree? Nah, Ruruka's party might just be capable enough to be surrounded by monsters and come out with only a few scratches. She's likely confident that she won't be

done in so easily by the monsters around here. Still, she did get wounded.

"Well, even deep in the forest, strong monsters almost never show up around here. Guess we were unlucky. Ah, but we'll prepare for the worst from now on so it's fine? ...Alright, I talked my head off, could we get to the treatment?"

As she says that, Ruruka places her fingers on her shirt's hem and prepares to lift it. I indulged Ruruka in that long conversation... and finally the wait is over. But at the moment, Yuel is right here. What we're going to do now isn't something that Yuel should watch.

"Oh yeah, Yuel. I'm kinda thirsty. I'd like to drink hot tea, could you go brew me some?"

"Hot tea, is it?"

Yuel responds questioningly. It's still spring, but the temperature is rather high today. She's probably wondering why I specifically asked for hot tea on such a hot day. It's so that Yuel won't see what we're about to do.

"Yeah, hot tea. I want to drink some piping-hot tea, steeped in boiling water. Get it to a proper boil, got it?"

"Yes, Master!"

Yuel responds enthusiastically at my words and runs off to the kitchen. It's not like I don't feel a little guilty, but there's no avoiding it. That's right, it's unavoidable.

Now that I think about it, when's the last time I had a discount negotiation with Ruruka? I feel like it was quite a while ago. Around two weeks? I can't let this opportunity go to waste. As I'm thinking about it—

"U-Umm, you... don't really have to give me a discount today, okay?"

Ruruka blurts that out.

Then she shows me the wound on her abdomen. She only raises her shirt a little. Just the tiniest bit.

What in the world happened to this girl?

Yuel is in the kitchen, and Eris is out making house calls to elderly patients.

Previously she didn't hesitate to negotiate a discount even when it was a tricky situation where Eris might have been watching.

"I-It's 400 Zeni, you know?"

"Yep. You raised your prices, right? I understand. Heal, please."

Strange.

400 Zeni is a high price compared to what it used to be. And usually she would rush into discount negotiations without hesitation. For a wound on her abdomen, Ruruka would show off by stripping her shirt until it just barely covered her breasts, starting with her perfectly tight abs then exposing her elegantly thin waist. Then when I raised my voice again, she'd lift her shirt a bit higher, giving me glimpses of underboob. I'd be in agony, and at the end of my rope I'd reluctantly, with great hesitation, lower the fee. That's how it's supposed to go.

So what's going on this time?

Ruruka can barely look me in the eyes, and she's only lifting her shirt a little. Forget about seeing underboob or waist, not even her belly button is visible. All that I can see is a patch of flesh, no larger than my palm, in the gap between her shirt and her shorts. There's a small cut on it.

"Hey, Shiki... get on with it..."

While I'm looking at the wound on her belly and pondering, Ruruka mutters at me.

What's up with her? Did she decide to change her image to become pure and lady-like or something? Sure, I like it better when there's some shyness, but it's not like Ruruka wasn't shy before. Showing herself to me while still being shy about it, that attitude was great. So why...

"Hey, it's fine if you want a discount?"

I unintentionally let that slip. It's not something that should ever be brought up from the hospital's side, but I'm unable to let it go unsaid.

"I don't have much money... but Shiki, if you get turned on... you can just go to that... brothel, right? So I figured we should stop. N-Not like I'm bothered by

it or anything, okay?"

"A misunderstanding! I'm telling you, that was a misunderstanding...!"

"Whaat, so that's what it was? Ahaha, I jumped to conclusions, huh."

"...As long as you understand."

While Yuel was steeping the tea, I managed to sort out Ruruka's misconception. I sorted it out, but...

"Master, I've brought your tea."

The minute we finish our discussion, Yuel comes in carrying my tea on a tray.

Then she plops down right next to me as usual. What was the point of fixing the misunderstanding if we have no time left for price negotiations? I receive precisely 400 Zeni from Ruruka, pat Yuel's head for bringing me the scalding tea, and down it indifferently.

After Ruruka goes back, I continue doing medical treatment at the hospital. In the past few days, the number of customers at the hospital has risen a little. It's probably a result of the monster subjugation requests that the knight brigade has been sending out. Rather than the hospitals near the center of the city, this one near the outer edge is no doubt easier to use for the adventurers who've been hunting monsters outside the city lately.

Between sips of the piping-hot tea that Yuel (under the impression that I enjoy piping-hot tea) has been tirelessly making for me every time my cup is empty, I treat patients' injuries. I use Heal for light wounds, an occasional High Heal for more severe injuries, and Heal again for tongue burns.

That's how we've been spending our days.

That night, a knocking noise wakes me up. It's still dark outside. Feels like it's late at night.

"...It's from the entryway. Who could it be at a time like this?"

On the neighboring bed, Eris sits up and rubs her eyes sleepily. Indeed, I can hear a noise coming from the direction of the entryway. Someone must be knocking on the front door, even though it's this late at night. A visitor at this hour... though since they're expressly knocking on the door, there's no way it's

a prowler or burglar.

"Shiki, Shiki! Please, get up!"

Then I hear a familiar voice. It's Ruruka's. As I wonder what might have happened, I head to the entrance.

"What's the matter, at a time like this?"

When I open the door, Ruruka is there, out of breath and shoulders heaving. It looks like she ran all the way to this hospital. From her expression I can tell that she's desperate and in a hurry. I don't suppose she was unable to endure her young body's urges and came for a "night visit".

"Thank goodness, you're awake! Please, come with me! Fran and Sera... they collapsed!"



## Chapter 29 – Late Night Treatment

Hurry, hurry! With Ruruka speeding me along, we traverse the darkened city. Because of the time, only the two of us are heading to Ruruka's inn.

According to Ruruka, while they were maintaining their equipment after dinner, Fran and Sera suddenly collapsed with a high fever. She wanted someone to use healing magic on them, but since it was already late most hospitals were closed, so that's why she came to me.

She's concerned about the fact that they both developed a fever at approximately the same time, but doesn't know what could have caused that. The three of them had the same meal for dinner, so it doesn't seem to be because they ate something bad. Ruruka's still lively, after all.

Which reminds me, Ruruka was saying that earlier that day, they narrowly escaped disaster while they were on a quest inside the forest. Maybe all that fatigue caught up to them after they returned to the city, or something along those lines?

After a while, we reach the inn where Ruruka's party is staying. It's quite an ordinary inn, neither good nor bad, and not particularly close to or far from the labyrinth. It looks a bit more expensive than the one Yuel and I were previously staying at, though.

We enter the inn, and Ruruka unlocks the door to their 2nd-story room.

It's a fairly spacious room with three beds.

Two of the beds have girls sleeping on them. If I'm not mistaken, the blonde-haired flat one is Fran and the blue-haired busty one is Sera.

Their faces are flushed, no doubt from the fever, and their skin is covered in beads of sweat. Both of their blankets are pushed off and crumpled into the corner of their beds. I'm guessing it was too hot for them.



They're wearing not pajamas, but normal clothes. I guess Ruruka prioritized fetching me over things like looking after them or changing their clothes. Their

breathing is ragged, and their eyes are clenched shut. It certainly looks like they're in pain.

However, how can I put it, this is...

"Hey Shiki, I'd appreciate it if you'd stop staring at Fran and Sera while they sleep."

Ruruka speaks up as I'm inspecting the two of them. Yeah, their sleeping figures are rather alluring to the eyes.

Since they're wearing ordinary clothes I'm only a little intrigued, but if it had been thin pajamas then this scene would've been quite immodest. Don't tell me that's the reason why Ruruka didn't change their clothes into something more comfortable? She might have suspected that I'd do something to the two of them under the pretext of medical treatment. How rude.

"Ruruka, don't get me wrong. I'm just examining the condition of the patients, that's all."

"...Examining?"

"Yeah, the way to treat an illness differs depending on the problem. For example, if it's caused by toxins building up within the body, that requires not just Heal but also Dis-Poison, right? It's essential to consider Fran and Sera when dealing with their illness, so the meticulous observation I'm doing right now is necessary."

I declare to Ruruka. For them to both fall ill at the same time, I still have no idea what could be the cause. If they ate something with poison in it, that would require Dis-Poison, but if it was a fever brought on by simple exhaustion then Heal would be enough. It's not like I have any ulterior motive for looking at them. It's important to use magic properly, that's all.

Well whatever. I may as well use both Heal and Dis-Poison. I mean, I have no knowledge about the diseases of this world.

"O-Oh, I see. Sorry, I misunderstood. Even though I made you come all the way here at a time like this.

...But please don't look at Fran's skirt or Sera's chest so much, alright?"

Ruruka makes a dubious expression, but she still apologizes in response. It has some bite to it, though.

"I'm glad you understand."

I return my gaze from Ruruka onto the sleeping pair and take a peek at Fran's slender, sweat-soaked thighs beneath the hem of her skirt, then at Sera's chest as it trembles softly each time she takes a shallow breath.

Neither of them show any reaction as I approach. I don't know if they're asleep or just out of it, but they don't seem conscious. And then, when I go to start the treatment right away—

"Hey Shiki, wait a minute. Why are your fingers on Sera's shirt button?"

—Ruruka tells me to stop.

Of course there's a reason for this.

"You see, when the body is weak from illness, it's important to loosen the chest to make breathing easier."

"...Is that so?"

"Yeah, uncovering the chest makes it easier to breathe, and allows heat to escape. See, look closely at Sera. Doesn't it look painful for her with those clothes constricting her chest?"

"O-oh, that makes sense. Sorry, I misunderstood. But you don't need to do that; could you please just use healing magic?"

Ruruka makes an expression that's relieved yet anxious. Clearly she's not sure whether or not I'm telling the truth.

"Sure, I will after I thoroughly, carefully examine Sera's condition."

When she hears that, Ruruka inserts herself between me and Sera. No matter how you look at it I think she's being too cautious, but I suppose that's just how important her comrades are to her.

However, I can't even give her medical treatment like this. Since it can't be helped, I turn to Fran on the opposite bed.

Fran. Now that I think about it, this little shit has been pretty rude to me ever

since our first meeting. I don't particularly hold a grudge, but looking at her face like this, some slightly murky feelings rise up. Nevertheless, after Ruruka brought me all the way here and begged me to treat them, I can't really tell her that I'll only heal Sera. I have no intention of neglecting a patient put in front of me.

Then, when I go to begin Fran's treatment—

"Hey Shiki, wait a minute. Why are you trying to lift Fran's skirt?"

—I'm told to stop by Ruruka.

Of course there's a reason for this too.

"Just figured I'd have a look at this annoying girl's panties?"

"G-Get away! Get away from Fran this instant!"

"I-I'm only joking, don't take it seriously."

"I'm worried because I can't see it any other way..."

Ruruka makes a tired face and sighs. If you're that worried, then you should've brought some other healer. But she might not know any other healer that she could've called this late at night.

Alright, I suppose I went too far with the joke. But when I'm about to turn a sincere eye to the treatment, something suddenly catches my attention.

"Hmm? What's this..."

Because I was holding Fran's skirt and getting ready to flip it, the skirt is raised slightly. Underneath, I discover something that interests me on her inner thighs, so I lift up the skirt. Her panties aren't what I'm interested in, by the way.

"Ah! You actually did it! You flipped an unconscious girl's skirt! Shiki, you're the absolute worst!"

Ruruka shouts at me, but I didn't flip Fran's skirt in order to look at those pink, lacy panties. I had a just cause. I had to do it. I'm sure Ruruka will forgive me.

Then, I point at it and speak.

"No, you're wrong. You take a look too, Ruruka. At this."

On Fran's inner thighs, there's an unnatural, sickeningly purple rash.

It's pervading her thighs as if it spread from the center of her body.

"What do you mean loo... what is that!?"

When Ruruka sees the purple rash on Fran's thighs, she's so surprised that she forgets about covering Fran's exposed panties.

"I've never seen symptoms like these before at the hospital. Perhaps this could be the cause of her illness? Ruruka, undress Sera too and take a look. There's a possibility that she might have the same rash."

"O-okay, got it."

At my instruction, Ruruka places her hands on Sera's clothes, then gives me an exasperated look. I wonder what's wrong?

"Could you please leave the room for a minute?"

"Don't worry about me."

"Get out! I'm begging you, get out!"

I wait outside the room for a while, then she calls me back in.

"As you suspected, there was a purple rash."

Ruruka mentions, having confirmed what was beneath Sera's clothes. It seems they share the same symptoms after all.

"Is there anything you can think of? Back when you were in trouble in the forest, did they eat any mushrooms that were growing there or something?"

"T-They didn't eat any. We were lost in the middle of the forest but we made sure to bring food in our item boxes. I try to be prepared too, y'know."

And yet the cause is still unknown.

Well, I'm not at all familiar with the diseases of this world. Although Eris' hospital didn't get many customers, I did spend 3 months working there, so I should at least be familiar with all of the major ones. But that knowledge is probably only at the level of a layperson from this world. Thinking about that won't change anything though.

For the time being, I treat the two of them with Heal and Dis-Poison.

Fran's breathing softens as she continues to sleep. To make sure that her rash has disappeared, I reach for her skirt again and... let Ruruka do it instead since she's glaring at me. I take my payment and leave the inn behind me.

## Chapter 30 – Knight

It's the next day after I treated Fran and Sera. While I'm gazing out the hospital window, there's one thing in particular on my mind.

Depending on how I deal with it, the direction of my life might change from now on. It's that important of a concern.

"Yuel-chan, I baked cookies, want some?"

"...! Thank you very much, Eris-san!"

Surveying the inside of the hospital, Eris seems to have made some pastries for her afternoon tea, and Yuel receives them with an ear-to-ear smile and runs back over to me.

Pinching a cookie, I pop it in my mouth and it crumbles apart. Delicious. However, that has nothing to do with what's troubling me.

"Yuel-chan, is it tasty?"

"Ift's delifiouf!"

Neither does the fact that the habit Eris is wearing today is getting a little tight around the bustline, yet she continues to wear it since it'd be wasteful to throw it out. Nor the fact that I can't help but notice how her breasts are straining against it. The fact that Yuel is happily munching on the mouthful of delicious cookies stuffed in her cheeks has nothing to do with my concern either.

There's only one thing troubling me.

Visible from the window, half-hiding behind the rustic hospital gate, there's a green-haired woman in armor peering in this direction. An unknown woman, whom I've never met. I'm racking my brain to figure out how to deal with this woman who neither Yuel nor Eris have noticed.

It would be great if the woman at the gate were just an ordinary lady. "Oh, a fan of mine?" and that would be the end of it. However, even though I don't recognize her face, I do recognize the armor that she's wearing.



I've seen it at times defending the city gates, at times subduing violent criminals. Occasionally lined up in ranks, marching through the gates to subjugate monsters outside the city.

...That is the armor of this city's knight brigade.

Why is there a knight peering in at this privately-owned hospital? Moreover, it looks almost like she's performing surveillance.

The first thing that comes to mind is that this female knight has come to the hospital for medical treatment. But that can't be it. The knight brigade supposedly has its own dedicated healers. Excellent ones, capable of using High Heal.

After I overhunted the Huge Slime, word got around among adventurers that I was an excellent healer who uses High Heal, although I didn't show them that I'm capable of using EX Heal. Eris, Yuel, and Eight's group aside, nobody should view me as anything other than a healer merely capable of using High Heal. I did claim to be able to use EX Heal at the slave market, but they never believed me in the first place.

Since the knights have their own healers who wield that same level of healing magic, and not to mention who'll use it free of charge, she should elect to use them. Besides, she's peeking in from the gate and not even entering the hospital in the first place.

Though she came to the hospital, that female knight's purpose is not treatment. In other words, she's here not as a customer but as a knight, which means she must be here to carry out her duty.

That's right, arresting criminals.

As far as what job the knights have within the city, that's it. Who did she come to arrest? There's no need to think about it.

It's me.

Neither Eris nor Yuel are the type who would ever commit a crime. If they had their backs up against the wall and were forced to choose between the law and their lives then maybe it would be different, but they wouldn't engage in criminal behavior during their everyday lives.

But what about me?

I'm the type of person who gets kicked out of a hospital due to sexual harassment. I've peeped on a chaste [sister](#) in the bath, and I've groped a waitress' ass at the tavern. I've rubbed a fellow adventurer's breasts, and flipped another one's skirt. I've been involved in so many other minor incidents up to this point that I can't even remember them all.

...It wouldn't be strange if one or two people reported me.

No, but, it's hard to believe that a knight would expressly come to arrest me over such things. It's only at the severe reprimand level, hopefully.

However, in addition to all that I also visited an illegal gambling den to try and make money. I hid my face at that time, though.

It's not like nothing comes to mind. But rather, I can't think of a reason that would be enough to cause a knight to set up a stakeout in front of the hospital.

No, there's still the possibility that it's a personal acquaintance of Eris. And the probability that it's a stalker of mine isn't zero. It's not zero. In any case, if the knight really is here to arrest me, I won't try to run. I'll go out with my head held high.

And, as I'm thinking it over, the female knight at the gate begins to move.

The female knight shakes her head, does a [guts pose](#), makes a determined expression and walks through the gate.

Then, the front door opens and the female knight enters the room.

Without waiting to see if our attention is focused on her, the female knight opens her mouth—

"M-Marietta of the Merhartz knight brigade shpeaking! I'm h-here today to inquire about an excellent hyealer!"

and bites her tongue.

"Um, would you like some tea?"

"Ah, that's, n-not necessary."

When the female knight flubs her self-introduction and panics, Eris sits her

down at a chair and gives her some tea for the time being. Eris flashes a look in my direction, suspicious about what might have brought the knight to the hospital. She doesn't seem to be one of Eris' acquaintances. The female knight, Marietta, doesn't appear to know about me either, so the stalker premise is out. Whatever, not like I thought that's what it would be.

"H-Hey, Marietta...san, may I ask why you were watching from outside the hospital for so long?"

"Uh, errr, I'm sorry. I'm terribly shy. For me to enter an unfamiliar place, the timing has to be just... u-umm, anyway, please don't mind the formalities."

...I see. This woman, Marietta of the knight brigade, apparently wasn't standing guard outside the hospital but rather waiting for the right timing to enter. How misleading.

"Well then, what brings Miss Knight to this hospital? It must be something other than medical treatment, no?"

Eris speaks. Certainly, looking her up and down, no injuries can be found. At least she doesn't seem to be here to arrest me. I don't feel any tension from Marietta like she's about to capture a criminal. From her attitude and her humble impression, it's more like she's cowering. She seems like a weak-willed girl who gets all the odd jobs pushed onto her.

"Err, umm, I heard that there's a healer by the name of Shiki-san living here..."

Marietta mentions as she timidly looks in my direction.

"Me?"

"Y-Yes. Errr, where should I begin... Ah, were you aware that lately a large number of monsters have been appearing on the outskirts of this city?"

"Yeah."

It's the same thing that Ruruka was talking about earlier. Oh yeah, those subjugation requests came from the knight brigade, didn't they?

"Errr, this morning, we confirmed the cause of the increase in monsters. In order to resolve the matter, the captain has ordered us to quickly assemble as many capable healers as possible. Um, well, according to the information

furnished by the adventurer's guild, you're an adventurer with a taste for young girls who's always running around with one, and you're an excellent healer capable of using High Heal numerous times... you must have quite a lot of mana, right?"

Marietta explains, ever more timidly. She doesn't appear to have positive proof. She's probably just following up on a rumor she heard. Along with some other cruel, unfounded rumors. Eris' gaze is a bit painful.

However, for her to especially come all the way to the hospital, there must be some sort of reason.

"Mmmmmmm... ah, it's true that my mana capacity is somewhat higher than average... but doesn't the knight brigade have its own healers? Excellent ones that use High Heal. Why gather healers at the last minute? Also, I'm not a lolicon, okay?"

"Eh? Errr, yes. Um, the monster behind the recent monster outbreak is... a somewhat special monster known as the [Krankheit](#) Turtle. It's a giant tortoise monster that, in order to find prey, emits a special poison from its body that can spread for dozens of meters. Depending on the individual, it can spread over a hundred meters, and it's said to have the troublesome characteristic of weakening its prey. Errr, to cope with this poison mist, it's necessary to periodically suppress the symptoms by casting Heal, but the present members of the knight brigade would be unable to keep up with the required healing, based on the captain's judgment."

Krankheit Turtle. It's the first time I'm hearing the name, but it sounds like a troublesome monster. To put it in game terms, doesn't a wide-area poison attack give off a boss monster vibe? I'm betting the reason they say it was the cause of the monster outbreak is because it drove other monsters out of the forest as it drew nearer to the city or something like that.

"If I'm not mistaken, it would be a disaster if it reached the town. Yet in that case the customers would also...! No, nevermind."

Upon Marietta's words, Eris' eyes widen as if she's realized something, but immediately afterwards she vehemently shakes her head in shame. Did she imagine how many customers the hospital would get? Maybe it's because of all

the money troubles she's been dealing with until just recently.

Then, as I'm watching Eris feel conflicted—

—abruptly, one of the buttons on her chest snaps off with a *ping*.

The button traces a slow arc through the air.

Having lost a button, her chest spreads slightly.

Holding her head and stooping over while wrestling with guilt, Eris herself doesn't notice.

At that very moment, as my eyes are being drawn towards the "delta zone" born in the gap between the cloth, Yuel enters my line of sight. As Yuel follows the button's flight, her jaw drops and she pats her own vacant chest as she stares on dumbfounded.

And then, for just an instant, our eyes meet. I wish she wouldn't look at me like that.

It's impossible. No matter what she does, it's impossible. I can't console her.

...Let's pretend I didn't see anything.

Pretend I didn't see anything, and resume the conversation.

"T-That sure sounds like a troublesome monster, doesn't it?"

"Eh? Ah, err, that's right. The Krankheit Turtle's poison is slow-acting, but it's extremely potent. If the Krankheit Turtle were to come to the city, it would outpace the treatment and there would most likely be enormous casualties. But the Krankheit Turtle is slow, and it's still deep within the forest, so there's no need to be concerned about that point."

Marietta glances briefly at Eris' chest, but continues talking. Good girl, you can read the atmosphere. Yuel composes herself, then carefully takes a peek at the gap in Eris' clothes.

"Although it's within the forest, if you're going to subjugate it, do you know its exact location?"

"Y-Yes, it was early this morning, but an adventurer came to us asking for separate compensation for the treatment fee when her party members came

down with a strange illness after entering the forest. Those girls were exposed to a small quantity of the Krankheit Turtle's poison mist, so if we go to the location where the incident occurred then it shouldn't be far off."

This sounds like a familiar story somehow. Is it about Ruruka? That shamelessness certainly sounds like her. It's probably Ruruka. I see, so that monster called Krankheit Turtle or whatever was the cause of their fever. They ended up like that from the Krankheit Turtle's slow-acting poison after they were exposed to just a small amount of the poison mist. And the symptoms didn't develop for Ruruka because she came to me and received healing magic right after they got back from the forest.

While I'm making connections in my head, Marietta corrects her posture and opens her mouth.

"Although the Krankheit Turtle's movement speed is by no means fast, if we allow too much time to pass, there's still the possibility of losing sight of it within the vast forest. In order to counteract the poison mist and safely subjugate it, we wish for an excellent healer like Shiki-san to accompany us by all means."

And then, after informing me with a sincere expression—

".....Also, um... your chest button, came off? It's... impressive."

she approaches Eris, and says that.

Eris' face turns red and she hides her voluptuous breasts as Yuel stares at them in amazement.

## Chapter 31 – Bracelet

After Marietta points it out, Eris quickly covers her breasts. Yuel stares at Eris in amazement, then looks back at me like she's scrutinizing my facial expression.

...Even if you want me to do something about your chest situation, there's nothing I can do to fix it.

About all I could do is show Yuel my own chest and tell her, "Don't worry, I'm the same, we match" to console her. If I did that Yuel would cry.

So yeah, let's pretend I didn't see anything and keep talking to Marietta.

"Am I the only one the knight brigade is asking to cooperate?"

"Errr, y-yes, at present that is the case."

Marietta glances in Eris' direction as she answers. It's a bit of a loaded statement. Does saying "at present" mean that there might still be the possibility of calling out to her eventually? Like if more capable healers turn them down, there's still the possibility that average healers like Eris will have their turn come up? Meaning that if the quality is bad then they'll have to settle for quantity.

But then what should I do? To be honest, I kinda feel like it's a hassle. If monsters are swarming outside the city, there's a part of me that just wants to stay safe within the city and spend my time observing Eris' breasts.

It would be easy enough to say "Please ask someone else".

But... Yuel is looking at me right now. With a somewhat nervous expression, she's steadily watching me.

And before my eyes there stands a timid female knight who's in great distress. She's here to implore me to lend my strength in defense of the city where we all live. I get the feeling that as Yuel's master, who's respectable for his nobleness, kinder and more altruistic than anyone, and totally the coolest, I

can't refuse.

Right, to Yuel, my personality wouldn't allow me to hesitate.

The respect for me in Yuel's eyes is slightly clouded now, but it would be unpleasant in a lot of ways if it were to disappear. Like if she were to find out the precise reason why I got kicked out of Eris' hospital, or what exactly I was doing to Ruruka under the pretense of medical treatment. My evaluation would no doubt plummet from respect to contempt.

Well, knights are strong enough to easily capture former adventurers who've committed crimes. If I'm protected by that group, I doubt I'll have to face much danger anyway. So long as I don't get lost within the forest, I'm sure everything will be fine.

Besides, if I were to refuse this invitation and some other healer went in my place and died, that would leave a bad aftertaste in my mouth. I can use EX Heal, so I won't die so easily, and if anyone gets mortally wounded I can deal with it. I have no intention of showing EX Heal to people who might have noble connections such as knights, but thinking about the possibilities, it's probably best if I go along.

While I'm thinking about it, I suddenly raise my head. Perhaps taking my silent deliberation as a sign of my intent to refuse, Marietta becomes teary-eyed. It's a bit cute. With that lack of self-confidence she feels kinda like a small animal. Now that I get a closer look, her tits aren't bad either.

Then, with her head slightly lowered, Marietta nervously asks for my response.

"Is it too much to ask?"

"It's not."

It's not too much at all. In fact I'd like for you to pay me the reward with your body, if possible. I don't say that out loud though.

"RReally!? T-That's such a relieeeef. I couldn't even meet with any eminent members of the church, and other hospitals turned me away since they had



their own business to maintain. I don't know what I'd do if I was refused again...!"

Upon my words, Marietta shows a relieved expression. Yuel nods as if she can relate. As we're about to conclude the discussion—

"W-Wait a minute, won't it be dangerous?"

Eris' cheeks blush shyly as she opens her mouth. Her face is red, but her expression is serious.

But rather than that, wouldn't it be better to go change clothes right away? You're hiding your chest with your hands but it's not hidden. Or what, are you that worried about me?

Oh my. Oh me oh my. You're completely hopeless, Eris.

"If Shiki goes, then won't Yuel-chan go with him? Yuel-chan can fight, but I'm still worried about her."

Ah, of course. I won't die that easily, right. Since I can use healing magic, right.

"I-I... will follow Master wherever he goes! Master, I will protect you!"

Then, Yuel responds to Eris' words with that. As far as I can tell from her expression, she seems considerably determined. I'm a bit worried that she keeps glancing back at Eris' chest, though.

"Errrrr, there shouldn't be any problem with bringing a personal guard. Back at the adventurer's guild, they did mention that the dark elf girl who's always with you is quite strong. And as for the knight brigade, we will ensure your safety... although we can't make any absolute guarantees."

It would be quite disgraceful for the knight brigade to deny someone an escort and then have them get injured, I suppose. Honestly, I'd be more comfortable if Marietta vetoed Yuel's involvement at this point, but it seems that would be unfavorable from the knight brigade's stance. Well, Yuel has skill and combat experience from the dungeon. She shouldn't become a hindrance. Maybe it's fine for her to come along. And it'd probably be difficult to convince her to stay when I'm going. Let's give it a shot.

"Ah, but don't worry, alright? The knight brigade will properly protect you! No

matter if it's an Armor Ogre variant infesting the highway, or a flight of Forest Drakes in the depths of the forest, the knight brigade won't fall behind!"

I've never heard of those monsters, but from the names I get the feeling that they're strong. Are those the types of powerful monsters that exist in this area?

Looking at Eris, she's displeased, but it seems she won't say anything further. Maybe she sensed from the look on Yuel's face that it would be difficult to dissuade her.

"W-Well then, please excuse me for today. We set out early tomorrow morning, so please assemble at the south city gate."

Then, after her parting remark, she looks at Eris on the spur of the moment—

"...A-Also, umm, if possible, I'd like to know... how did they get to be that big? D-Does... rubbing them help after all?"

—and asks her for some advice.

After Marietta leaves, Yuel's expression turns dark.

Eris told Marietta that she didn't rub her breasts or anything in order to increase her bust size. She waved her hands fervently while explaining with embarrassment that she didn't do anything special.

Is it because of that?

Let's not talk to Yuel right now. It's not impossible that she'll take Marietta's "they grow if you rub them" seriously. There's also the possibility that she'll ask me to do it.

A while later, Yuel recovers and calls out to me. Her facial expression feels a bit stiff, though.

"Master, could we go shopping?"

"Shopping?"

"Yes, I want to make adequate preparations for leaving the city. Besides, that..."

Then Yuel starts fidgeting with her bank card which she's holding.

I see. I get it. Yuel has been paying close attention to the balance displayed on

her bank card lately. When she finds the time, she occasionally works part-time at the tavern. I guess she finally saved up enough money.

We do as Yuel suggested and head out into the streets to buy spare knives, food rations, and other provisions.

Afterwards, Yuel leads me by the hand... to an accessory shop near the center of town.

Glancing over the shelves, there are a wide variety of rings, bracelets, and earrings.

What's going on? I have a bit of a bad feeling about this.

Don't tell me Yuel is going to present me with a ring? The kind that gets put on the fourth finger of your left hand?

If Yuel uses up all the money she's been working so hard for to buy me a ring, and then looks at me with those pure eyes full of expectation, could I disregard that?

After giving me the ring, those blue eyes would stare at me intently, watching to see which finger I put it on. I can easily imagine Yuel's tears if I put that ring anywhere but the ring finger on my left hand.

If that situation comes to pass, I might just end up putting the ring on my ring finger. Then Eris would be disgusted when we return to the hospital. That's most likely how things would develop.

While I'm thinking about it, Yuel comes over with something in her hand.

"Master, this is... a return gift."

In Yuel's hand is... a bracelet, set with processed magic stones.

"A-A bracelet?"

Thank goodness. It's not a ring. I'm truly relieved that it's not a ring.

"Yes. It's not much, but there's an enchantment on it that will take a fatal blow for you. Once it activates... it will break, though."

I thought it was just decorative, but it's an awfully practical item. Nah, knowing Yuel, this is so like her.

And it's expensive. Although the effect is minor, it's an enchanted accessory. The price must be high enough to eat up all of her part-time job earnings. Even though I only bought her a negligee for like a thousand Zeni.

Is it my imagination or did Yuel's expression darken a bit? Maybe it doesn't suit me after all.

"Ah, excuse me, could I have another one of these bracelets in a different color?"

"Very well. Let's see, that will be 20,000 Zeni."

...So in Japanese currency this bracelet costs about 200,000 yen? [White Day](#) presents are only supposed to be up to three times more expensive, but it would seem Yuel has returned my gift twenty-fold. I'm taken aback by the price, but only a little. I mean, for an enchanted accessory it's probably on the cheap side.

Yuel looks somewhat crestfallen as I complete the purchase and receive the bracelet, but then I attach it to her wrist.

"Now we match, right?"

"...! Yes!"

Yuel's face lights up as she softly strokes the bracelet in delight.

## Chapter 32 – Earring

It's the next morning after receiving the Krankheit Turtle subjugation request from the knight brigade.

"We're off, Eris-san!"

In front of the hospital's gate, Yuel calls out to Eris in a chipper voice. In contrast, Eris has worn a complicated expression ever since yesterday.

Even during meals and before going to sleep, Eris has been casting worried glances in my direction. She can say whatever she wants, but I think she can't help but be worried about me.

Looking at Yuel as she slept with her arms around my waist, or at the matching bracelets on both of our wrists, Eris was making a critical face. Is she possibly concerned that I might actually put my hands on Yuel?

"Have a safe journey, Yuel-chan. And... please try your best to be careful.

...You too, Shiki."

Woah. Apparently Eris is honestly worried for my safety. That's great. She didn't label me as a lolicon for wearing matching bracelets with Yuel.

Then Eris' face turns serious as she continues.

"If you do anything like sexually harassing a knight, you won't be able to pass it off as a joke. And you certainly won't get off with just a severe warning. I'd hate to have to go to the knights' station to bail you out, got it?"

Oh, that. That's what it was? Well sure, that Marietta-san knight was pretty cute. But even I wouldn't do something like sexual harassment without considering the consequences. I'm at least mindful of my self-preservation.

Also, I wish you would stop saying things in front of Yuel that could invite a misunderstanding.

"I-I wouldn't do something like sexual harassment...! W-Well then, we should get going."

As I hastily put an end the conversation, Eris looks at me and giggles. Oh, she was teasing me?

"Wait."

Then, Eris takes a step towards me. A light thud reverberates through my chest.

As if she's trying to reaffirm my body warmth, Eris grips my clothes and lets her head fall onto my chest.

Her breasts are almost touching me. No, only a little bit but they are.

"Y-Yeah..."

What in the world is going on? It's unusual for Eris to let her guard down and stick so close to me. Even though she usually avoids physical contact with me so that I can't take advantage of it. Has she gone [\*dere\*](#)? Don't tell me she actually went *dere* on me? I only agreed to this request because I couldn't refuse it in front of the reverent Yuel, but maybe Eris is hugging me because I'm sincerely working for the sake of the city?



"I know somebody has to do it, so I can't tell you not to go, I understand that... but... please, make sure you come back safely."

Then, looking up at me, Eris says that.

I realize when I look into her eyes.

This is different.

Her eyes tell me she's seriously anxious about my safety. There's some bitterness in there too.

...That reminds me, Eris told me that her parents died in an accident. I didn't ask her what happened, but no doubt they left one day saying they'd be back and then never returned. I don't think this time will be that dangerous since I'll be protected by the knight brigade, but for Eris it might not feel that way.

And yet, with Eris' level of healing magic ability she'd only be a hindrance. There's no certainty that she'd be able to defend herself from monsters, either. So she can't even come along with the subjugation party. Because of that, how powerless must Eris be feeling right now?

"Don't worry."

I set my hand on Eris' as... I mean, on her head. Come on, I'm not so insensitive as to rub her ass when the mood is like this. To be honest, I want to keep hugging Eris to get my fill of the sensation of her breasts, but we're in front of Yuel.

"It will be fine, I'll protect Master no matter what!"

Then, looking at Eris, Yuel says something so reliable.

"So, when we get back, please teach me how to make those delicious cookies!"

But Yuel-san, that's what they call a [death flag](#).

Leaving the hospital, we head to the city gate to meet up with the knight brigade. Apparently Yuel has completely recovered from yesterday's "Eris chest button shock"; she's beaming while she walks beside me.

As we're walking, I observe Yuel, when suddenly her attention shifts.

Yuel briefly glances at my bracelet. Next, she gazes at her own bracelet and softly strokes it. With a satisfied sigh, she looks back at my bracelet again. Then,



perhaps realizing that I'm watching her, she bashfully claps her hands over her cheeks in embarrassment. Adorable.

Yuel seems extremely pleased with her bracelet. She's certainly happy that we match.

However, if these accessories activate, they'll supposedly break. I ended up buying the same magic item as Yuel on impulse, but maybe a normal accessory would have been better.

It's great that Yuel likes it, but will she be alright if it activates and gets destroyed? I have a feeling she'd cry.

She shouldn't receive any lethal attacks, so I doubt it will activate. But in case it does end up activating, I'll put some thought into how to comfort her in that scenario.

While I'm mulling it over, we arrive at the meeting place. Looking around the area, I see knights in armor as well as wizards and healers wearing uniform robes bearing the knight brigade emblem. Scattered among them are other healers like me. There are about 50 members of the knight brigade, and no more than 10 of my fellow healers. Seems a bit low, but I suppose you could call us the select few.

While I'm absent-mindedly looking out over the group, a red-haired girl in light armor pushes through the crowd as she approaches while waving her hands.

"Good morning, Shiki. Thanks for the day before yesterday. So they called on you too for the Krankheit Turtle subjugation, huh?"

It's Ruruka. She has her usual adventuring equipment. Why is she here? I thought that only the knight brigade and a few excellent healers would be coming.

"...Why are you here?"

"Ehehe, you wanna know?"

When I ask, Ruruka responds in a bit of a boastful tone.

"Nah, not really."

Well, it's not like I can't guess. Ruruka's party took damage from the Krankheit Turtle, so the reason they're here is most likely related to that. Like to serve as guides, for instance.

"W-Why not, ask me! The truth is, We're the ones who confirmed the location of the Krankheit Turtle. That's why we're here as guides for the knight brigade. Aren't we awesome? You surprised?"

Yep, they're guides. But, rather than confirming its location, didn't they just happen to run into the mist by accident? At least that's what I remember Ruruka telling me earlier. Like, "we got rained on and then a fog rolled in and it was almost a disaster" or something.

I look at Ruruka with cold eyes, and perhaps remembering that, she quickly averts her gaze.

"H-Hey, what's with that bracelet?"

Then, Ruruka takes a glance at my bracelet.

"Oh, this? Actually, Yuel..."

Although, how should I explain it at a time like this? If I just honestly say "Yuel bought it for me" I'll look like a total deadbeat. And I feel that saying "Yuel and I got them as presents for each other" would go over even worse.

"Master said that it was a present from someone he's always taking care of."

As I'm hesitating, Yuel gives that explanation. Then, in a whisper, she mumbles as she strokes her bracelet.

"Master and I match."

She sighs contentedly, with a completely, utterly happy expression.

Did Ruruka hear what Yuel said, or not? Looking at my bracelet, then at Yuel's, then back at mine again... she becomes solemn.

Yeah, she's not pleased about me and Yuel matching after all. It may not be a pair of rings, but it's still a pair of accessories. It wouldn't be strange if she called me a lolicon and backed away.

"H-Hey, in that case, what about me?"

While I'm thinking about it, Ruruka blurts that out, somewhat nervously.

"In that case" must be referring to what Yuel said earlier about taking care of people. But that was just a pretext for Yuel since she's so reserved. As for Eight and Geyser who've been reasonably helpful to me, I have absolutely no intention of gifting them anything at this point.

"As for Ruruka... nothing?"

"Ehhh!?"

You could say that Ruruka has taken care of me in a way, but I don't feel like I can give her a present. It would be unwise to set that precedent. If Ruruka pressed her chest against me and asked "will you buy it?" I'm confident that my wallet would end up empty.

"W-Why... b-but, but, it's a good opportunity, so I'm giving you this."

Saying that, Ruruka removes one of the earrings she's wearing. It's set with a red gem and looks fairly expensive.

"An earring?"

"L-Look, it's to thank you for treating Fran and Sera, okay?"

No, even if you say it's a gift, it's troublesome if you only hand over a single earring.

Ignoring my thoughts, Ruruka quickly attaches the earring to my ear.

"N-Now we match, right?"

Then, lifting her hair, she shows off the earring on her other ear.



My heart skips a beat. What was that? I wonder if she got jealous over Yuel and that got her competitive spirit burning? No no, hold on, she might just be

flirting. Remember, how many times has she created misunderstandings so far by getting me to reduce the treatment fee?

Also, if this is just a performance, how expensive of a return gift is she going to demand from me?

## Chapter 33 – Fran

As I fiddle with the earring that Ruruka attached to my ear in a peculiar mood, Marietta, Fran, and Sera come walking over while discussing something. Marietta is making a troubled face, while Fran looks somehow satisfied, and meanwhile Sera is sighing at her.

"Ah, Shiki-san, thank you for coming. Errr, we'll be moving soon, so please make your way to the gates."

When Marietta finds me, she makes that announcement. It seems we'll be departing soon.

Then, when I turn to Yuel to tell her "let's move"—

Yuel is staring steadily at my ear. Keenly, intently staring at my ear. Now that I take a good look, she's clutching her sleeves slightly too.

...I can't read her expression. What could be on her mind?

No, I can guess if I give it some thought. She's most likely feeling jealous towards Ruruka. That might have put a damper on her delight over the fact that we had matching bracelets.

...Do I need to follow up with her somehow? But it's not like I can say "the bracelet Yuel gave me is way more important than Ruruka's earring" right in front of Ruruka either. First of all, if I said something like that to Ruruka she would be pissed. Even if she doesn't hold any romantic feelings for me, she would definitely be pissed. And she'd probably be convinced "that guy is totally a lolicon".

What should I do? Guess I'll just pat Yuel's head until she's satisfied.

"U-Um..."

Nah, that's not a good way to handle her. Children are sensitive to that kind of treatment. If by chance Yuel was feeling a special connection because of the matching accessories, it's not impossible that tears could start steadily welling up in her adorable eyes. I need to think this over seriously. Should I promise to go shopping for something with Yuel next time? But, if that means every time

we go outside the city from now on...

"S-Shiki-san...?"

Wait, is Yuel really jealous of Ruruka in the first place? I don't sense any jealousy or grief in her expression. She's just... staring at the earring. Maybe unexpectedly she's thinking "I want an earring too". No, but—

"U-Um, Shiki-san? You and Yuel-chan are w-within your rights to stare at each other all you want. But, um, please quickly make your way to the gates..."

...Sorry.

As we walk towards the gate, Sera interrupts her conversation with Fran and greets me.

"Umm, I was informed that you went out of your way to give us medical treatment in the middle of the night. I would like to express my gratitude. You truly saved us."

How exceptionally polite.

"Nah, don't worry about it. Ruruka properly compensated me."

When I say that, Sera lifts her head and smiles sweetly. It feels like an adult smile.

When I treated them, I thought for sure that the two of them were asleep at the time, but they must have heard about it from Ruruka.

...

...I can't sense any hidden meaning in Sera's attitude.

I look at Ruruka. She makes a bit of an embarrassed face and averts her gaze from Fran and Sera.

...It seems that Ruruka kept quiet about the things I was doing when I gave them treatment.

Though at the time I said it was a medical procedure, to be honest I just couldn't suppress my impulses when faced with two defenseless girls lying in bed. Being so courteously thanked makes me feel somewhat conflicted, like it makes my own sleaziness stand out. I kinda feel like a piece of garbage. If

someone ever calls me that I can't deny it, either.

As I'm ruminating, Sera nudges Fran with her elbow.

"..."

Fran slumps a bit and knits her brows, showing some hesitation. Then for some reason she glances in Marietta's direction.

Huh, now that I think about it Marietta is really shy, but she was speaking normally with Fran and Sera earlier. Perhaps they already knew each other.



"...W-Well... t-thank you."

Then, Fran mumbles that in a barely audible voice.

What's with that? She actually thanked me normally. I thought she was the prudish, man-hating type. Was it that? Did she become strangely meek after her illness?

But there's still a bit of a conflicted feeling. As for the fact that I flipped her skirt and saw her panties, that was half due to her disparaging attitude towards me up until that point, but half because I was honestly concerned about the



rash on her thighs.

Being treated normally after all that, how do I say this, I'm troubled. I feel distinctly guilty in retrospect. Not that I have any regrets.

But, I'm probably making a pretty unpleasant face right now.

I quickly avert my gaze, and there's Ruruka silently flapping her mouth, trying to tell me something.

When I tilt my head, Ruruka gets annoyed and starts moving her mouth again. That's—

"R-E-S-T-R-O-O-M? What, we're about to leave, go take care of it quickly."

"N-No! It's that, the haras... no, nevermind! E-Errr... I'm trying to tell you not to do that anymore!"

I get it. Ruruka must be a bit angry after all. Ruruka allowed me to see her underwear and massage her, but that wasn't the case for her companions. Or wait, maybe she means that I shouldn't do those things with anyone but her.

"...? What do you mean?"

Watching the exchange between me and Ruruka, Sera tilts her head curiously.

We're outside the city. Flanked by the knights, we advance down the highway. I was sure we would be riding in a carriage or something, but apparently we're going on foot. Well, since we have item boxes there's no need to use a carriage to transport our luggage, and they said it'll only take about an hour on foot to reach the forest in the first place. Besides, horses probably won't enter the forest, either. It might be too much effort to specifically bring horses for such a short distance and then have to post them outside the forest or send them back to the city.

As we walk, I watch the city of Merhatz gradually disappear into the distance. The weather is unfortunately cloudy, but the high stone wall surrounding the labyrinth city looks quite splendid.

Now that I think about it, this is my first time going outside the city. I've spent my days almost entirely in the hospital, the tavern, or the labyrinth. Even though it's the city I've always been living in, just seeing it from the outside

makes me feel like a tourist.

"I never realized this until now, but the city is pretty huge, huh."

"That's right. It's such an impressive city, isn't it?"

Yuel backs me up in a voice full of admiration. That reminds me, back when I bought Yuel she wasn't able to see anything with her eyes. This might be her first time seeing the city from the outside, too.

"My, so you do understand."

An arrogant voice. I recognize it as Fran's in an instant. She has a boastful expression, snickering with her hand on her hip.

What strange wind is blowing? I certainly didn't think she was the type to ever strike up a conversation with a man. She must be overflowing with patriotism.

"You've good eyes for such a young one; Father would surely be delighted."

Of course. She was talking to Yuel, of course. Wait, what does she mean by "Father would be delighted"? Was her father the construction foreman or something?

...I have a feeling I'm way off the mark on that one.

Noticing my bewilderment, Ruruka comes up beside me and whispers.

"...Y'know, Fran is actually the daughter of the lord of this city."

"Huhhh!?"

Ruruka moves a little further away from Fran and occasionally gestures at her.

"Fran's real name is Fran Luluna Meirhartz<sup>[1]</sup>. She's a noble daughter of the family that's ruled over this city for generations. It's not like she's particularly hiding it, but I thought I should let you know, Shiki. If you get in trouble for sexually harassing her, I won't defend you, got it?"

"H-Hold on a minute. Why is someone like that acting as an adventurer of all things?"

You'll freak me out if you suddenly tell me such a thing. What's that all about?

"...E-Err, that's, you see, how do I say this... In the past, Fran's father... the lord, arranged a marriage interview for her. But Fran hated the idea of getting married to a man, and her marriage candidate... well, apparently she rejected him by firing a magic attack into his nether regions. So that her father would never bring up the topic of marriage interviews again."

Whoa. I knew she hated men, but that's being way too harsh on them. No matter how much healing magic exists, that's not something you should ever do. Oh, maybe that's why Ruruka kept her mouth shut about the details from the time I healed Fran. I can't thank her enough.

That explains the thing about Marietta talking with her earlier. It's no surprise that the lord's daughter would have connections within the knight brigade.

No, but even if she's acquainted with Marietta or the other knights, is it alright for them to bring the lord's daughter outside the safety of the city walls? Fran is strong-willed, so maybe she demanded for them to bring her along. There's also the fact that they needed her as a guide for this particular mission.

"But apparently, Fran was driven out of the house because of that incident. "If you're that against him, I don't care if it's a commoner or whoever but go find some man you'd rather be with, or go fix your misandry, and don't come back until you do!". Well, I say she was driven out, but he was still worried after all. She had always gotten along well with Sera, so he had Sera go with her as her attendant. Seems that Fran still wants to inherit the title herself someday, so she's trying to win her father's approval by stacking up enough achievements to overshadow her man-hating. And trying her hardest not to reveal her man-hating in front of her father's acquaintances and so on."

Learn about the outside world and beat your personality into shape by yourself, something like that? Even if Fran's father tried to fix her man-hating by setting up marriage interviews and soirées and whatnot, I doubt there's any nobleman who'd want to go anywhere near a girl who might shoot magic attacks at his crotch. Her father might have had his hands tied.

When I take a peek in Fran's direction, she's earnestly telling Yuel about something. I try to listen in, and it seems like it has something to do with the construction of Merhatz's city walls. That sounds terribly boring, but Yuel is

listening intently. Fran seems like she's kinda enjoying it too. Perhaps the two of them have something in common to commiserate over? Their chests, for instance.

By the time I finish my conversation with Ruruka and return to Yuel's side, Yuel has gone on the offensive. She's going on and on about "Master is amazing!", "He's an honest, respectable person!" and the rest of my wonderful qualities, which Fran is listening to with a bored expression. I wonder why she's humoring Yuel at all when it's about a man she hates, but I suppose even for Fran, ignoring that joyful face would pain her conscience.

It seems that in my absence, Yuel has been proselytizing about my greatness. That reminds me, Eris also told me, "I heard that Yuel's master was a wonderful person". I see, so that's how these misunderstandings have been spreading. I'm in a good mood, though, so I don't think I'll stop her.

And then, as Yuel's monologue is coming to a close, we arrive at the forest.

---

Footnotes:

1. Her family name is written as メイルハルツ instead of the usual メルハーツ.

## Chapter 34 – Deep Into the Forest

Flanked by knights, we advance into the center of the forest. Progress has been fairly safe so far. The monsters around these parts don't seem to pose much of a challenge to a knight, and the wizards in the back make short work of them as we march on.

There are a few times when small monsters like slimes slip past the knights' notice, but they can't escape Yuel's sharpened senses and she skewers them with a knife. Ever since we entered the forest, Yuel has stuck close to me, and her ears twitch as she constantly monitors our surroundings. As if she's trying to pinpoint any lurking monsters' locations from the slightest movement or sound. We're safe. No problems.

"Fireba...ahh! Curses...! I almost had it!"

If only this slightly irritable blonde twin-drills weren't next to me, or rather next to Yuel. The blondie, Fran, has been recklessly itching for battle ever since we entered the forest. Seems like she can't wait to slaughter some monsters.

Oh yeah, before we entered the forest, Ruruka was saying something about Fran getting driven out of her house and wanting to stack up achievements in order to return home. She's likely trying to make a name for herself as a prominent magic user even among the knights in the hope that word will get back to the lord. Too bad, but the knights are taking out the monsters before Fran can even finish her chants.

However, how do I say this, personally I find this girl really hard to deal with. There's a precariousness to her, like you can't be sure a magic attack won't come flying at you. Like if you happened to touch her bare skin, your nether region would be reduced to cinders. Now matter how good I am at healing magic, something like that is no joke.

I wish this unstable girl's guardians would keep a tighter leash on her, but right now it looks like Ruruka and Sera are busy deliberating with a male knight over a map. No doubt they're discussing which direction we should go from here.

Also, I don't appreciate the way that Fran is greedily leering at Yuel every time she dispatches a monster. Yuel seems to have captured her interest in some way, but—

"Come now, Yuel, won't you consider joining our party?"

...I really don't appreciate her trying to poach a slave right under her master's nose, either. Although the same thing happened with Ruruka before.

"U-Um, I want to stay together with Master, so."

"It's unthinkable. You may be fine at the moment, but for a man to procure a female slave, he must surely have wicked intentions. In fact, just now he was eyeing Ruruka and Sera with a most lecherous gaze."

Nor do I appreciate her unabashedly bad-mouthing me in front of my face. I most certainly was not looking at them like a total lech. I was just glancing at their chests a teensy-weensy bit, that's all.

"M-Master is not that kind of person!"

"...Well, I shall leave it at that. Nevertheless, Ruruka can be rather careless at times, so having a vigilant vanguard such as yourself would be quite reassuring. If anything were to happen, I shall take you under my care, so you are welcome anytime, alright?"

In other words, if I were thinking about selling Yuel? Maybe I would consider it if Yuel told me she wanted to leave me of her own will, but I'm being cautious to avoid it ever coming to that. So I won't be selling her in the first place.

"Um... sorry!"

Then, with a single word, Yuel turns back around and starts restlessly moving her ears. She seems to be monitoring our surroundings again. For Yuel it's quite the curt attitude, but she might want to remain vigilant. We don't know where monsters might show up within the forest, after all.

When Yuel cuts off the conversation, Fran turns her glare my way next. I wish she'd cut it out already. As Yuel's master I shouldn't respond immaturely, but I won't be satisfied unless I retort.

"Oi oi, give it a rest. You've sure been running your damn mouth. As for

Yuel, I have no intention of doing such things to..."

–And, the instant I mention that.

Yuel, who was monitoring our surroundings with a knife raised, whips her head around.

Then, completely dropping her guard, she stares at me dumbfounded.

Yuel is watching me.

"W-When I say I have no intention of doing such things... it's not like I wouldn't ever? M-Maybe in the future, though?"

At my reassurance, Yuel looks relieved and returns to monitoring our surroundings.

And Fran's face distorts as if she's about to say "uwahh".

Objection overruled.

"See, I knew it, I knew it had to be like that! Filthy!"

Of course the abuse comes flying. But I couldn't help it. I couldn't betray that look in Yuel's eyes just now. Even just suggesting that I don't intend to get involved with her made her anxious enough to stop her lookout, so I don't know what would happen to her if I confirmed it.

"What's more, you may not be aware of this, but I am the daughter of the lord of this city. A man like you shouldn't even be speaking to... oooh."

Fran continues to scorn me. Honestly, if some guy said "I'm gonna put my hands on this kid once she's older" then naturally he'd be condemned. Even I would denounce him.

But then Fran unexpectedly stops her abuse.

Because Ruruka and Sera have returned.

"Ouch!"

Sera bops Fran on the head.

"I let you out of my sight for one second and you pick a quarrel with a man. Goodness, Fran, what am I going to do with you..."

With a hint of anger in her voice, Sera admonishes Fran. With experienced motions, she grinds her fists into Fran's temples.

"That hurts! That hurts, I say! Wait, Sera, just listen to-!"

"Hey, how did the atmosphere get so serious in the short time we were gone? Let's all try to get along better, okay?"

Ruruka comes to mediate as well.

But I don't say anything to Ruruka about the fact that Fran was scolding me for saying I would put my hands on Yuel. Please just ignore that.

After that we proceed a bit deeper into the forest, when suddenly there's a cold sensation on the tip of my nose. I try touching it, and it feels damp. It's rain.

"Huh, is that rain?"

"It does seem that rain has started to fall. The weather has taken a turn for the worse since before we entered the forest."

Looks like Ruruka and Sera have noticed it too.

"Well then, should we take a break and wait for it to let up?"

It's around the late afternoon. About 3 or 4 o'clock, roughly. We've taken a number of breaks so far, but seems like it's not gonna be possible to get the subjugation done in a single day.

"Mmm, it probably won't anytime soon, according to the knight I was just talking to."

"Shiki-san, this is something I just heard from the knights, but the Krankheit Turtle supposedly loves water. It usually makes its dwelling along the river, but it's been known to migrate elsewhere during periods of heavy rainfall. We should probably hurry."

As I thought, their conversation with the knight earlier was about the Krankheit Turtle's whereabouts. It migrates during rainfall, huh? As expected for a monster with Turtle in the name, its ecology must be similar to a tortoise's.



"Following the river upstream on this map, there's a good chance that it will be somewhere around here. We're less than an hour away, so we might be able to subjugate it before it moves."

Sera takes out a map and comes to show us.

"Besides, I think the subjugation will be easier when it's raining. Y'see, the rain will weaken the poison mist."

Ruruka has a fitting perspective for an adventurer.

Is Fran sulking? Having distanced herself from Sera and Ruruka, she's currently prodding Yuel's ears and fiddling with her hair. She's being a real nuisance. I can only see the back of Yuel's head from here, but I can easily imagine the dissatisfied expression she must be making. I wish Fran would stop.

The rainfall is getting more intense. All of a sudden, the knights halt their march.

"Just now, we received a report that one of our scouts has discovered the Krankheit Turtle. It's reportedly dead ahead along the riverbank, in a small clearing. We will now conduct a brief strategy meeting. Everyone, assemble!"

One of the knights issues instructions.

The Krankheit Turtle is in a clearing along the riverbank. It's lying in a nest-like structure that it built right next to the river.

Its appearance is that of a tortoise with a somewhat distinctive shell.

But it has a fiendish, monstrous face, and its body length is close to 5m. It's probably bigger than the Huge Slime.

There are a number of spiny protuberances along the shell, with holes at their tips. Those holes are...

At which point the Krankheit Turtle looks in our direction. It must have noticed us approaching. Perhaps because the knights' armor was making noise? Should've gone with bikini armor.

As soon as the knights fan out, the Krankheit Turtle spouts fog from the holes in its shell. That must be the poison mist.

It's coming out with a lot of force. But the rain is obviously erasing it significantly. Visibility is poor, but it's not like we can't see.

"Alright, I'm counting on you to counteract it."

Ruruka calls out to me as well, then plunges into the mist.

My job is to counteract the poison by treating Yuel, Ruruka's party, and the few other knights assigned to me.

The Krankheit Turtle's poison is slow-acting. However, if you approach it within melee range, it apparently takes effect in less than a minute. That's why the healers were each assigned a group and instructed to periodically cleanse the poison to ward against its effects. I move close enough to avoid missing, and cast Heal and Dis-Poison on the knights and Ruruka's party.

Yuel doesn't leave my side. Well, she probably understands that her tiny knives won't do anything against that giant body. Or maybe she prefers to be my personal bodyguard.

The attacks from the Krankheit Turtle that we need to be cautious of are supposedly a charge attack and its bite. Its movements aren't particularly fast, but it seems incomparably heavier than the Huge Slime. It wouldn't be possible to stop its charge. As for its bite, I'm not at the front lines so that's none of my concern.

The details of our strategic plan are straightforward.

The Krankheit Turtle's charge isn't fast but it can't be stopped. So, the tanks attract its attention, the rear guard encircle it and barrage it with magic attacks and the healers periodically cleanse poison and treat the injured. With this many healers, it probably won't be that difficult to handle the monster. That poison mist is the main concern.

Actually, the knights on the front line aren't getting injured. They skillfully avoid its attacks and draw aggro by slicing it with their swords. The knights' movements are quick, but more importantly the Krankheit Turtle's movements are slow. Maybe that slowness is precisely why it evolved to use poison to weaken its prey.

At the strategy meeting, I was only told to avoid its charge at all costs, and to

dodge away from other people, but so far it hasn't given any indication that it's ever even going to charge. Rather, the Krankheit Turtle doesn't look like it's even attacking all that much. It's remaining fixed in place, as if it's just trying to endure.

I easily deal with the poison using Area Dis-Poison as magic comes flying at the Krankheit Turtle from the rear guard. Sera also fires her bow at its exposed sections outside the shell. And Fran's magic... hasn't gone off. She's reciting some sort of extremely long chant.

I'm surprised at how smoothly this is going. The Krankheit Turtle has gotten all beat up without offering much resistance. It should go down easily.

In a few minutes, the Krankheit Turtle won't be able to move at all. As if it's just trying to endure, it's steadily huddling in that one spot. Such one-sided torment doesn't really sit well with me, but it can't be helped. This monster is harmful. Just by being here, it's driven the monsters in the forest out onto the highways and closer to the town, not to mention there's the possibility of it approaching the town itself. If that were to happen the consequences would be dire. Right now, with only the knights here, we have enough healers to outpace the poison, but if the Krankheit Turtle got near the town with all of its residents... the treatment couldn't keep up. It would surely become a catastrophe.

Wherever the cures fall behind, I expand the range of Area Dis-Poison to cover any gaps.

But man, tortoises sure are sturdy. It's not going down easily. I think it's only a matter of time though.

—In the middle of all that.

Fran, who has been reciting some sort of long chant ever since the battle began, approaches the knights. Then, she whips her cane into the air.

"W-Wait, step back! Everybody fall back!"

When Ruruka sees that, she urges the knights to evacuate. I have a bad feeling about this. Perhaps sharing my apprehension, the knights distance themselves from the Krankheit Turtle as well.

"I shall put an end to this! Thunder Rain!!"



There's a flash, followed by a thunderous roar.

For a moment, my eyes are dazzled.

When my vision returns, smoke is rising from the Krankheit Turtle. And, for a few meters surrounding it, the ground is burnt pitch-black.

"...Fu, fufu. Do you recognize my greatness now, I wonder?"

Fran mutters to nobody in particular. That must have used a considerable amount of mana though; she seems lightheaded.

But man, that spell just now was amazing. I bet it'd be powerful enough to evaporate the Huge Slime in a single hit.

It's over. That was unexpectedly quick. The mist disperses from around the Krankheit Turtle. One last poison cure, and my job here will be done.

"Master, not yet."

At the same time Yuel mutters.

"———!!"

There's a resounding roar.

With black smoke rising from its giant body, the Krankheit Turtle stands up. Even that spell didn't finish it off.

Ignoring the nearby tanks, the Krankheit Turtle locks its gaze onto Fran and plunges straight towards her. I thought it was defeated. Evidently the knights thought the same, as even they are surprised.

"Rear guard, fall back! Evade it!"

One of the knights promptly slashes at its legs. However, it doesn't stop.

One of the knights stabs its head with a sword. Even then, its direction doesn't change.

It steadily closes in on Fran. There's something almost vindictive about it.

As for Fran... she's fallen on her butt. Maybe due to the sudden roar she received while she was lightheaded. Or perhaps she just can't move from expending too much mana on that spell just now.

Because I'm the one in charge of curing Fran's poison, I'm the closest to her. And the Krankheit Turtle is still far enough away.

"Don't get mad."

I lift Fran into my arms and distance myself from the Krankheit Turtle.

"...!? Wai..."

I was surprised at its sudden charge, but tortoises are slow after all. I run to an area free from bystanders while carrying Fran. She's unexpectedly light, maybe because her chest doesn't have much weight on it? It's a little heavier than Yuel's, I guess. Even though I'm running while carrying her, I manage to avoid the charge. I'm a little worried that the ground is so slippery from all the rain, though.

"Master, here it comes!"

Or so I thought, but it seems to have adjusted its direction. The knights are trying to somehow put an end to it by repeatedly attacking it, but it still doesn't go down. Perhaps thanks to the knights' attacks, the Krankheit Turtle's speed is falling compared to the initial charge, but it would still be better to create a bit more distance.

But man, why did it suddenly charge like that? Even though before that point it was huddled up and couldn't move very well.

—When I quickly glance at the place where the Krankheit turtle used to be, there's something burnt sitting there.

Something blackened, cracked, and round.

It's— an egg?

Was the Krankheit Turtle protecting that? And that's why it couldn't move? That last area-of-effect spell from Fran must have broken it.

But it seems the Krankheit Turtle is at the limits of its endurance, too. As a knight delivers one final sword stab to the head, it shudders with a jerk, and its movements become dull.

Then, the Krankheit Turtle falls to the ground with a huge, thudding impact. It's not moving anymore.

This time, it looks like we finally won.

"...Hey, w-wait, let go of me! Where are you touching!?"

Fran seems to become aware of me again, and blushes furiously as she starts to struggle.

"Look, I'm setting you down now, so don't struggle."

—At that moment, I hear an awful snapping noise.

Looking towards the sound, countless cracks are running through the ground below me.

"Master!"

A few meters away, Yuel cries out.

I didn't notice.

While I was avoiding the Krankheit Turtle's charge, and carrying Fran to a vacant area, I ended up coming right up to the edge of the river.

Originating from the Krankheit Turtle's corpse, countless cracks – no, fissures – are spreading in all directions. The ground at my feet is about to slide into the river.

Due to the downpour, the soil is loose and the river is high. When the Krankheit Turtle fell, it sent out a huge shockwave.

The color quickly drains from my face. By reflex, I fling Fran in the opposite direction of the river.

My foothold slides away, and I fall towards the river.

Yuel and the knights come rushing over, but they don't make it in time.

I plunge into the river. Right before I'm swallowed up by the muddy water, I feel like I see something come diving towards me.

## Chapter 35 – Falling Into the River

I awaken from the sensation of something touching me softly. Something long and thin is stroking my chest. It feels kinda ticklish. Also there's something heavy.

—When I open my eyes, Yuel is there.

Her ear is poking into my chest as she presses her head into my body. Her expression is somewhat uneasy. Her eyebrows are furrowed, and her eyes are clenched shut.

That sensation just now must have been Yuel's hair brushing against my skin.

When I'm about to speak out to Yuel, I notice. There was something out of the ordinary about that sensation.

Yuel's hair touched my bare skin. That's right, my bare skin.

I inspect myself. How did I end up in just my underwear?

...Strange. Where the heck did my habit go? And why is Yuel clinging to my body?

It's essential to remain calm at a time like this. One by one, I'll sort out the circumstances.

First, where are my clothes?

When I glimpse around a little, I soon spot them. They're folded neatly, next to my head.

Next, where are we?

It appears to be a small cave, a grotto. Our surroundings are dimly lit by a campfire, and I can hear the sound of a river running.

River.

"...Oh right. I fell into the river."

"M-Masterrr!"

When I utter those words, Yuel's eyes snap open.



"Master, are you hurt!?"

"N-Nah, I'm fine n...ow ow ow."

When I shift my posture slightly, pain shoots through my entire body. I don't feel like I have any broken bones, but I'm bruised all over. Also, my head aches. I don't remember very well, but I may have hit it after I fell into the river. First things first, I'll give myself medical treatment.

"Heal! Are you hurt anywhere, Yuel?"

"Errr, I'm..."

She stammers a bit. I inspect her closer, and there's blood oozing from her palms.

"You're bleeding! EX Heal!"

But man, what happened after I fell into the river?

I was laid down in this grotto by the riverside. Yuel and I are currently alone. And I saw a shadow as I was about to be swallowed up by the river. I think I can piece together the general picture.

At the time I fell into the river, Yuel probably dove in after me. But I hit my head or something soon afterwards and lost consciousness. Yuel somehow rescued me and brought me here. Something along those lines. And there are tracks along the ground from me being dragged in from outside the grotto.

However, I don't know where this is. I'm unsure how much time has passed since then, either.

First, it's important that we share information.

Yuel tells me matter-of-factly what happened. To give a brief summary:

It seems that after I fell into the river, Yuel also jumped right in after me. She somehow managed to grab a hold of me, and clung to me so we wouldn't get separated. Although she did well trying to save me, the river current was fast. And I soon lost consciousness as well, so it was difficult for her to rescue me by herself. We were swept along by the current for some time.

During that time, Yuel frantically thought about ways to save me. Then she

came up with one.

She would take out a rope from her item box, tie one end to my hand, and fasten the other end to a knife. Then she would throw the knife at one of the trees along the river. After several failures, she managed to lodge the knife into a tree and pull us onto the riverbank.

So the bleeding on her palms was from the rope burns when she fished me out of the river. After that, she dragged me into a nearby grotto and laid me down there.

As for my clothes, they were soaked so supposedly she stripped them to prevent me from catching a cold. And because she couldn't retrieve a change of clothes from my item box, she decided to dry them by a campfire. And she only had her head on my chest just now in order to listen for my heartbeat.

The more I hear of her story, the more I'm impressed by how hard she struggled.

I mean, it takes some serious courage to dive into river rapids. And some real cleverness to improvise a way to save me. And some real heart not to blame her pitiful master for falling into a river and losing consciousness right away, but instead to just keep taking caring of me.

What's with this excellent brat.

Yuel herself is disappointed that she dropped one of the knives she received from her master into the water, though. And she seems pretty depressed about it.

But such a thing is truly trivial. Considering that she successfully extricated me from the river, she's already repaid me a million times over.

It makes me want to do something for Yuel to make her happy, but she'll probably be happy no matter what I do. Whenever she defeated monsters in the labyrinth, she was happy just with a light head pat, but... if I only pet her head after all this, she might not be entirely satisfied.

But for now, I'll start with petting her.

"Yuel, you really did a good job. You saved me."

As I thank her while petting her head, Yuel shyly presses her head into my hand. She seems thoroughly pleased.

...I guess this is good enough after all.

While I pet her head, I continue talking.

"By the way, do you have any idea how much time has passed since then?"

"...Um, including the time that Master was asleep, I think it's been about three hours."

3 hours since then, huh? Then it's around 7 pm now? I was having quite the power nap, it seems.

"Any idea how far we went downriver?"

"...I'm sorry, I don't know. But the current was fast, so I think we went quite a long distance."

Apparently she doesn't know precisely, but we've covered a long distance. Or conversely, it was far enough to make it impossible to tell precisely?

That reminds me, a long time ago I watched a drama with a scene where the protagonist saves a puppy that fell into an overflowing river. In that drama, an adult was able to run in parallel alongside the puppy as it was swept along by the river current. In the present situation, I feel like the river I fell into was flowing at about the same speed.

By my calculations, if we spent say 20-30 minutes floating in the river, as a rough estimate we would've moved around 5km. It might've been more, depending on how long we were in the river.

I wonder if we can reunite with the subjugation unit. Visibility is poor, and we're in the middle of a forest teeming with monsters.

Suddenly, the word that Ruruka used previously at the hospital springs to mind.

—Disaster.

No, no, it's fine, we should be fine.

It's obvious because I fell into the river, but rivers are an easily identifiable

landmark. If we follow the river upstream, we should be able to meet back up with the subjugation unit led by the knight brigade.

...If the subjugation unit hasn't left the river.

However, if the subjugation unit hasn't given up on my survival, there's a possibility that they'll follow the river downstream and come searching the perimeter.

Nevertheless, before the battle with the Krankheit Turtle, Sera showed me a map. If I recall correctly, this river leaves the forest and follows along the highway that connects to the city of Merhatz. If we follow the river downstream, we'll eventually reach the highway. I don't remember exactly how far it is, but it probably shouldn't take an entire day.

What's our best option?

First we could go upriver and aim to reunite with the subjugation unit. If we don't meet up with them by the time we reach the location where we fought the Krankheit Turtle, we'll turn around and follow the river downstream instead, out of the forest and onto the highway. That approach might be better.

"Master?"

As I'm contemplating, Yuel calls out to me. I guess I was thinking too hard and stopped moving my hand.

"Yuel, as far as what we'll do next, I'm thinking of following the river upstream to try and meet up with the subjugation unit. It's possible that they're searching for us too. What do you think?"

"Yes. I also think it would be better to meet up with the knights sooner if possible. It's very dangerous outside the city."

"Well then, shall we get going as soon as the night is over?"

"...Master, it might be safer to move at night."

Yuel makes a serious face as she speaks.

"Inside the forest, the scariest situation is getting surrounded by a large number of monsters. At least at night, the monsters that can't see in the dark will be sleeping."

I see.

"No, but, it'll be dark, right? We can't see either, so how could we fight with monsters?"

"I can see clearly at night. Since I'm a dark elf."

Yuel sure is high-spec. She even comes equipped with a night vision mode.

We spend ten-odd minutes ascending upriver. The sky is fairly clear, and moonlight shines along the riverside. There's moonlight, but this is a forest rampant with monsters. There are truly terrifying things out here.

As Yuel twitches her ears to detect any signs of nearby monsters, we advance little by little. And then, perhaps noticing something, she abruptly breaks into a run.

For an instant, a knife glimmers in the moonlight.

I creep closer, and there's a corpse there of a demihuman-type monster with a doglike face. Its neck is sliced open from a single slash.

Moving discreetly and always attacking preemptively as soon as she spots a monster, it's an aggressive style. Almost like an assassin. I'm seeing a talent in Yuel that should not be nurtured.

Nah, it may be that in Yuel's case there was a reason that she had to take up such a style. Her body is tiny, and it's not like she has any skill with shields like Ruruka does. Her physical features aren't suited to protecting another person. So she might have had to adopt an offensive style to prevent anything from getting close to me and becoming a threat in the first place. It's perfectly logical now that I think about it.

As I'm rationalizing, Yuel suddenly stops moving. Then, with her ears prickling, she restlessly observes the surroundings.

"Master, up ahead there is most likely a Kobold village."

"You can tell?"

"Yes. There are indications of many monsters. A very large-scale group... there might be more than a hundred. That Kobold just now was probably a guard for the village."

"Do you think you can win?"

"...I'm sorry, I think it would most likely be impossible for me on my own."

Of course. That was an absurd suggestion.

"Could we get past them without being noticed?"

"...Kobolds can see in the dark too, so it would be risky. If we go any further, I think there's a chance that we'll be surrounded before we know it."

A large-scale Kobold village, huh. What should we do?

For a moment the thought occurs to me of sending Yuel charging in on her own while I continually cast EX Heal on her from the trees, but no, that would be a waste of resources. Or rather I should say, I don't have the least bit of interest in enacting such a strategy.

So then, a detour? Kobolds can see at night, and from the looks of it their hearing and sense of smell are sharp too. If we're spotted and have to battle a large number of Kobolds, it'll become gruesome. We should take a significant detour.

No wait, taking a detour means moving further away from the river. In this vast forest, losing sight of a landmark such as the river would be painful. And there's also the chance that we'll pass by the subjugation unit without noticing.

What to do.

Yuel watches me as I think. And then I notice it.

The fact that Yuel is making a slightly tired, sleepy expression.

I feel a cold sweat drip down my back.

—That's right, what will I do if Yuel falls asleep?

This is bad. I didn't put in enough thought.

There's nobody else here but me and Yuel. Yuel can both search for enemies and fight, but I can't do either very well. I can't perceive any wild animals that approach silently, nor would I be able to protect Yuel from sudden attacks while she sleeps.

...Maybe there's no need for us to continue upriver.

Even if we do, if we can't meet up with the subjugation unit, getting back to town would take twice as long, or maybe even longer.

Under normal circumstances, just from rescuing me from the river and nursing me, Yuel would be pretty exhausted. I may have gotten some sleep, but Yuel likely spent that entire time on high alert keeping an eye out for monsters.

If we take a detour around the Kobold village now, continue upriver and don't meet up with the subjugation unit? I don't know if Yuel has the stamina for that. No, she may have great combat skill, but her physique isn't much different from a normal girl's. She likely couldn't hold up.

As soon as she hits the limits of her endurance, she'll fall victim to the monsters.

If we head downriver immediately, and at least make it out onto the highway, there's a chance we could meet up with a knight patrol or some merchants. In terms of sheer distance, we should be able to return to the city in a shorter time than if we tried to meet up with the subjugation unit. And there's no guarantee that the subjugation unit is coming downriver in the first place.

For a moment I consider staying in place and waiting patiently to be rescued, but there are monsters in this forest. A prolonged struggle is out of the question.

Fortunately, it hasn't been 20 minutes since we started heading upriver. The loss is small. We can still turn back.

"Yuel, let's give up on going upriver. We'll head downriver and aim for the highway back to town."

## Chapter 36 – Fatigued

"Downriver to the highway, is it?"

"Yeah. Taking a detour around the Kobold village and leaving the river would be unwise. I was thinking it'd be better to follow the river until we get onto the highway, to minimize the amount of time we spend in the forest."

When I propose to go downriver, Yuel quietly closes her eyes and starts to think. My number one reason is that I'm worried about Yuel's stamina, but even if I say that, I doubt Yuel will take it into consideration. Thinking about that time when she started working at the tavern, Yuel is the type to disregard her physical condition and overexert herself for the sake of her goals. I need to keep an eye on her to make sure she doesn't overdo it.

Yuel deliberates for a while, then nods gravely.

"...Certainly, a detour could be dangerous. Besides, with that many Kobolds living here, it's very likely there are multiple nests nearby of the small monsters that serve as their prey. If we were attacked by many of them at once, I might not be able to protect Master... I think there's a better chance that I would be able to protect Master if we go towards the highway."

Nests of small monsters. I didn't consider that possibility. Yuel is really knowledgeable. To the extent that I wonder if she's had previous experience with survival in the forest. It wouldn't be strange if she did.

With the discussion settled, Yuel stands a few steps ahead of me and starts to move. All the while restlessly monitoring our surroundings.

We proceed downriver. By following the river, we should be able to reach the highway in less than a day. It'll diverge somewhat from the route back to town, but this is the shortest distance to get back onto the highway without getting lost.

However, there's one thing I'm concerned about.

It's about Yuel, who's walking a few steps ahead of me. I sense something off about her.



With every slight sound, even the wind rustling through the trees, she has a pronounced nervous reaction. I feel like she's being overly sensitive. Is it me or is she too worked up?

During the times we explored the labyrinth, Yuel was a little more relaxed.

Vigilance is important, but there's a long road ahead of us. At this pace, I wonder how long she can endure.

"Yuel, we have a long way to go. If we're attacked by monsters, so long as I don't get knocked out or die in one hit, I can recover as much as we need it. And we have these protective bracelets too. So don't strain yourself too much, okay?"

"...Yes."

Yuel speaks hesitantly, but her appearance doesn't change. Perhaps that means this is the minimum level of vigilance required in this forest. Honestly, it's not like I would know. Yuel could very well be more knowledgeable than me in that area.

"Yuel, have you had experience with survival in the forest before?"

Those words unexpectedly leave my mouth, and Yuel stops moving.

I immediately regret asking. I might have just stepped on a landmine. I ended up asking Yuel about her past.

Up until now, I've tried to touch upon Yuel's past as little as possible.

Since it concerns the times when her status became that of a slave, I doubt her past is something she would want to talk about.

For example, her parents could have sold her into slavery, or they could have been killed by monsters. Simply by asking her about it, I might have just dug up painful memories for Yuel.

"Yes. Back when I was in the orphanage, I would go to the forest to earn money by picking medicinal herbs or hunting monsters. Since I was apparently abandoned by my parents as soon as I was born."

And yet Yuel's response doesn't show any particular indication that she's bothered by it.

Orphanage. So Yuel used to live in an orphanage, huh?

It's just a conjecture, but I'm guessing she was sold to that slave trader by the orphanage. Though I have no idea if it went bankrupt, or if she was raised from the outset in order to be sold.

Well, setting that aside, if she's always been hunting monsters since her days in the orphanage, she must be familiar with the dangers of the forest. Perhaps I shouldn't be critiquing her mindset.

...

I fully understand now that Yuel has detailed knowledge of the forest.

"Yuel, was that orphanage in the city of Merhatz?"

But I did end up hearing a bit about her past. I have a feeling it isn't something I should ignore.

If that orphanage still existed, and Yuel wished to, there'd be options like providing financial support. She might still feel some emotional attachment to it. Maybe even now she's thinking that she'd like to go visit it.

Although there's also the opposite possibility.

"No, it was a bit further away, in a small town known as Crusell. Besides, the orphanage was going bankrupt when I was sold, so it's not there anymore."

So it did go bankrupt. Which must mean that Yuel was sold due to financial difficulties. And that's when she was transported from that town named Crusell or whatever over to Merhatz.

Well, Merhatz is a big city. Business was probably much better over here. And Yuel had combat skills, so the slave merchant might've thought she'd fetch a higher price in Merhatz since it's a labyrinth city.

But then what's the right thing for me to do at a time like this? There's not much I can do for Yuel since the orphanage is already gone. Having said that, I'm not that great at comforting people. It's a bit awkward.

"As for me, just being with Master right now makes me incredibly happy."

When I remain silent, Yuel says that with a pleasant smile.

...Now I'm the one who's being comforted instead.

So courageous. So innocent. Lemme pat your head.

Then when I reach over to Yuel—

Yuel abruptly whips around and runs off.

Brandishing a knife.

There must be a monster nearby.

Taking occasional breaks for rest and meals, we continue downriver. Food and drinks aren't a problem. There's plenty of food in my item box, as well as the warm water magic tool we found previously in the labyrinth.

Perhaps thanks to Yuel's vigilance, we haven't encountered any enemies that she couldn't defeat, nor any large groups of monsters. Although I didn't really notice when we were surrounded by knights, monsters attack suddenly and frequently. We can't ever let our guard down.

But even so, we've been able to cover a great distance so far. Seems like a lot of time has passed, as the sky is beginning to lighten.

I only looked at the map for a moment, so I don't know the exact distance to the highway. But it probably shouldn't be much further now.

"Yuel, are you alright?"

"...Yes."

However, or should I say after all? Yuel is obviously getting exhausted.

Her gait is wobbly, her pace has slowed down, and her head occasionally droops and snaps back up. She seems considerably drowsy. I get the feeling that she hasn't been holding her knife arm as high either. Staying focused for who knows how many hours, her nerves must be shot.

If I think back on it, Yuel was constantly monitoring our surroundings even when we were with the subjugation unit. Ever since yesterday, she's constantly been straining herself to remain vigilant for nearly an entire day. Her body may be at the limits of its endurance.

I wonder if we need to take a break.

No, wait, even though we've taken a few breaks so far, Yuel has barely rested. Even during meals, she doesn't let down her guard at all. Just letting more time pass will likely be counterproductive. At this point we may just need to try to make it out of the forest as quickly as possible.

—In the middle of that, Yuel's ears flicker again and she runs off.

Her attention is on a lone wolf-like monster up ahead. Before it notices her, Yuel twists a knife into its throat. It's her tried-and-true instakill pattern.

...However, the wound is shallow.

Yuel draws the knife back, but the wolf isn't dead.

The wolf makes a sharp cry and struggles violently to ward off Yuel. As I thought, Yuel seems exhausted. The usual Yuel would have taken it down in one hit.

Yuel immediately swings the knife down again and finishes off the wolf.

This time for sure, the wolf is no more. And yet, the battle caused quite a commotion. That cry would've been audible from quite far away.

Yuel scowls and her eyes dart around rapidly.

"Master, we need to leave immediately. There's a chance that monsters will be attracted by the noise. Please follow me."

As I was afraid, the noise of that battle was bad news for us. Yuel's tone indicates that there's no time to waste. She immediately starts to run, and I run after her.

Running and stopping, running and stopping, Yuel advances while repeatedly changing our direction in small increments. Most likely she's avoiding monsters.

Nevertheless, similar wolf monsters as the one earlier sporadically come at us.

Yuel meets the incoming wolves' throats with her knife while trying her best not to lose any time as we continue on.

"Master, this way!"

Yuel's expression is stiff, and her voice shows some desperation. She probably doesn't have much left in her.

Then, suddenly, there's a rustling sound from the thicket between me and Yuel. From it, a wolf monster's face pops out. It must have escaped Yuel's notice. It's extremely close.

When Yuel hears the sound, she trembles with a start, and instantly turns her gaze to the shadows within the bush.

—And at that instant, I notice something.

When Yuel turns her gaze to the overgrown bush, and sees the face of the wolf monster emerge from the shadows, she makes an *expression of relief*.

—There's a strong sense of incongruity.

Then a single doubt arises within me. Even though we're being attacked by a monster, why is Yuel showing a relieved expression?

I look at Yuel again.

...Have I perhaps made a huge misunderstanding?

Yuel instantly kills the wolf monster and begins to run again. I reflect as I run after her.

Yuel has been more vigilant for monsters than necessity would dictate. This entire time, she's never dropped her guard.

Why would that be?

Yuel is exhausting all her strength in order to protect me. She's the type to continue pushing herself past her limits.

I'm sure that's part of it. And yet, by some chance—  
isn't she just *afraid*?

Yuel reacted excessively to a noise from the shadows. Then the instant she saw the wolf monster, an expression of relief.

There's one possibility. Yuel was only afraid of *something*

. If I think of it that way, everything about her behavior thus far falls into place.

What could Yuel possibly be afraid of? Why would Yuel, who's always been hunting monsters since her days in the orphanage, be this afraid in the forest?

Something comes to mind.

...Come to think of it, at the time that I bought Yuel, didn't she have a huge injury? As if she was maimed by a monster?

Yuel was transported to Merhatz from another town as a slave. The slave merchant would've considered Yuel to be valuable when he bought her, since a slave merchant makes purchases with the intent of turning a profit.

And yet, at the time that I bought Yuel, she was gravely injured. Her eyes and nose were ruined, and she was missing an ear. From the scars, didn't it look almost as if they were torn off by the claws of a large monster?

It's hard to imagine that the slave merchant would damage his own property. Actually, the injured Yuel wasn't selling, and as soon as he found a buyer in me, he left in a hurry as if to escape. With such an unsightly slave, he must've been in a real bind.

In which case, Yuel was injured in the time between when she was sold to the slave trader in Crusell and when I bought her.

...She was injured while being transported. Attacked by a monster on the way? And they would've been using the highway for transportation.

Yuel and I are going towards the highway now. I may be trying to head for the exact place where Yuel was taken out by a monster.

It's only a theory. But right now Yuel clearly looks like she's afraid of something. This theory is starting to feel more realistic.

Near the highway, there's something that would strike fear into Yuel.

Do we need to keep following the river?

No, Yuel has been on edge ever since we left the city. Even if we had continued upriver, she surely would've been just as overly vigilant. Then, with Yuel on the verge of exhaustion, we would've been surrounded by a horde of

Kobolds or small monsters. Things easily could have ended up that way.

Besides, we should already be close to the highway. There's no way we can turn back at this point.

"Master, I'm going right!"

Just before we change directions, a wolf jumps out of a thicket again.

Yuel makes that same expression of relief again when she confirms that it's a wolf. Even though we encountered a monster.

Promptly eliminating it, Yuel maintains our route. I re-think things as I run after her.

What kind of expression was Yuel making when I told her I would be going outside the city?

...I have a feeling I missed it when I was preoccupied with Eris' chest.

Back when Yuel bought me the bracelet, didn't her expression darken? I brushed it off as her being gloomy because she had a complex about her own chest or whatever.

A bracelet that can only nullify a single powerful attack and then breaks after a single use. Why did she spend all of her hard-earned money up until now on buying me such an utterly practical magical item?

Now that I think it over, maybe what Yuel has been afraid of this entire time is going outside the city. And yet, despite that she came with me because she wanted to protect me from danger.

Yuel suddenly comes to a halt.

"...Master, I'm terribly sorry. We've been surrounded."

Wolves appear from the thicket. From the front, from the sides, and from behind.

There are five... six... no, more.

Sweat drips down my cheeks. I can no longer tell whether it's ordinary sweat or a cold sweat.

This is probably too much for Yuel to handle alone in her exhausted state. I wield my mace.

Encircling us, the wolves slowly close the distance between us. However, Yuel acts quickly.

She takes the knives she's holding in each hand and flings them at the two beasts in front of us. Without confirming whether or not they hit, she produces a new knife from her item box and stabs it into the eye of the wolf to my side. Three down in an instant.

If it's Yuel, she might be able to defeat them without any injuries. She might just manage it.

"——!"

The air reverberates. It's a wolf howling. The one on Yuel's side just raised a piercing howl.

Then, as if in response to that call, three additional wolves approach from the distance.

Not good. Not good. I understand now why Yuel said that the scariest situation in the forest is getting surrounded by monsters. Even if a lone beast is weak, if you're surrounded by many of them, you'll eventually be overwhelmed. Yuel might possibly be able to escape if she was by herself, but I'm here. There's no mistaking it, at this rate it's not going to end well.

—But then the wolves stiffen for a moment.

With no hesitation, Yuel takes out three of them. I bring one down too with a mace to the head.

At which point the wolves abruptly turn tail and run off.

What's going on? Did they run because too many of them were sacrificed?

While I'm in the middle of thinking — Yuel suddenly shudders.

Then she immediately turns to face me.

With a desperate expression.

"Masterrr!"



With all her might, Yuel shoves me away.

I feel myself sliding along the ground. The slightly muddy soil feels disgusting.

What the—

"Yuel, what's wro...ng?"

I pick myself up and turn around. Yuel isn't there.

In her place, there stands an *ogre*.

A massive physique, over 2m tall. That *ogre*

just mowed down the place where I had been standing with its giant arm.

Some sort of glittering shards are dancing in midair. What could those be?

I remember that color, that pattern. It's... Yuel's bracelet.

My heart leaps into my throat. I look beyond the area mowed down by the giant arm.

There lies the figure of Yuel, having flown a great distance, smashed into a tree.

## Chapter 37 – Ogre

Limbs thick enough to wrap my arm around. Over 2m tall, a massive physique. A single horn growing out of its head.

That ogre is standing there with its arm extended from a full swing.

Yuel was hurled several meters away, and is leaning limp against a tree.

So those wolves hadn't run off because their packmates died, but because they sensed the presence of this guy?

The ogre begins to walk towards the collapsed Yuel.

Oh no. That's no good.

It's obvious what it plans to do to the weakened Yuel. It intends to finish her off.

Right now Yuel is struggling to stand, but unable to. Because she defended me, she must have taken an incredible amount of damage. Yuel can't avoid the monster's attack in her current state.

Moreover, Yuel no longer has that bracelet. Eating another attack from this guy might really kill her. I can't let that happen. That's the one thing I cannot allow.

I absolutely can't let it reach her.

I jump to my feet, and grasp my mace tightly.

"Haaaaaaaaah!!"

I strike the ogre with my mace. It directly impacts the ogre's undefended back—

and bounces right off.

It makes a hard sound, as if hitting an iron plate. The recoil is so intense that I almost lose hold of the mace.

The sensation is almost metallic.

Wrenched by the deflected mace, my upper body is thrown backwards. I lose

my balance. My foot gets stuck in the mud beneath me and I fall on my rear.

The very next instant.

A sturdy arm sweeps just over my head. It generates a powerful gust of air. My body sways from the wind pressure alone. The puddles of water at my feet ripple.

—I can't win against this.

If I hadn't fallen over, that one blow might have crushed my head. That's how powerful a single strike was.

I'm convinced. I'm no match for it.

Besides, that rigid skin. Even though I hit it with a blunt metal weapon, there's no indication that it took any damage. From the looks of it, I'm not sure it would even be injured if Yuel slashed it with her knife. Even if Yuel and I attack together, we probably can't defeat it in the first place.

I can't fight this guy. There's no way I can win.

...No, this is no time to be thinking about winning or losing. Yuel is top priority. The first thing I need to do is save the wounded Yuel somehow.

I rise to my feet and run towards Yuel. In an instant, the ogre's fist grazes my back.

I feel a heat on my back as if it's on fire. I nearly lose my balance, but I recover and run over to Yuel.

I quickly pick her up, and cast healing magic—

then a shadow appears on the ground in front of me. I have a bad feeling about this.

Wrapping my arms around Yuel, I dive to the side.

The sturdy arm smashes into the spot where Yuel and I just were. The ground bursts open. Showered by stone fragments and mud, we roll along the ground.

Dangerous. This is truly dangerous. If I take a direct hit from an attack like that, I'll die. No mistaking it, I'll die. If it's a direct hit to the head, I might very well perish without even having the opportunity to cast healing magic. Even in

the best-case scenario, I'd surely lose consciousness.

I can only run. Right away, I grab a handful of soil and fling it at the ogre's eyes.

"EX Heal! Yuel, are you alright!?"

Without losing any momentum, I stand and run while holding Yuel. I flee from the ogre without looking back.

The ogre's angry bellow resounds from behind me. Apparently the dirt got into its eyes. That'll earn us a little time. My body is nearly frozen out of fear, but I have to create some distance right now.

"M-Master, I'm sorry."

Looking up at me, Yuel apologizes. Is she apologizing over letting that monster get so close without noticing it? Her voice is trembling.

As I thought, that monster may be the *something*

that Yuel was afraid of ever since we left the city.

The circumstances are what they are. I need confirmation from her.

"...Yuel, is that guy the one who ruined your eyes?"

"...!"

Upon my words, Yuel's eyes widen in surprise. Dead-on, huh? This guy may very well be the one Yuel was watching out for this entire time.

"M-Master, I'm fine, please put me down. I will gain some time, so please escape!"

Yuel's expression turns serious as she speaks. But that's impossible. That thing is different from the kind of monsters that we've fought in the labyrinth thus far. Yuel could die in a single hit. If she does die, I can't cure that.

Besides, and I can tell this because I'm carrying her; Yuel is trembling right now. To be crippled by it in the past, and then to receive an injury like that again now, there's no way she isn't afraid. Moreover, she's worn out from everything up to this point. She can't possibly contend with that monster.

What do I do?

Yuel's bracelet has broken. Furthermore, she's totally exhausted. Although she may have been preoccupied with the wolf monsters, it wasn't to the degree that that monster could get so close unnoticed. So her mental state is abnormal too. She's trying to hide it, but I can tell that she's frightened.

Fleeing is our only option.

Fortunately, perhaps thanks to that ogre monster, no other monsters are appearing. Considering the fact that the wolf monsters ran away, other monsters must be keeping an eye out for that one too.

"Master, p-please let me down!"

Yuel cries out to me desperately. I glance behind us, and the ogre has already drawn near.

It moves faster than I expected. At this rate, we'll be overtaken.

It's a large monster. Just having its killing intent focused on me makes me want to curl up into a ball.

I can't fight such a monster.

What will happen if I fight it? How did Yuel look at the slave market? Her face was smashed, her ear was ripped off, and she couldn't fight anymore.

I'm scared. My head fills with dread.

But that ogre sure is fast. It's steadily closing in on us. With my legs, I don't know if I can escape.

In order to get away, someone would have to stop its movements.

—A single thought comes to mind.

Yuel might hate me for it.

Now that I think about it, this is the first time I'm using this on Yuel. There wasn't anything this dangerous up until now. I didn't really think it would be necessary.

But I have to use it.

I softly set Yuel down on the ground. She immediately goes to face the ogre, but I grab her shoulder to stop her.

When Yuel turns around, our eyes meet. Her face makes an anxious expression that's determined but somewhat tense.

Then, as if having realized something, she gasps. Looking at me, she seems to have guessed what I'm about to do. But I ignore it and continue.

I infuse mana into my voice. Then — I command her.

"This is an order. Yuel, run away until you reach the city."

A crimson-red pattern rises to the surface of Yuel's shoulder.

"M-Masterrr!?"

Yuel screams.

The slave crest. A magic seal that compels absolute obedience to commands.

I wasn't confident in how to use it correctly, but infusing mana into my voice and giving a command seems to be enough. It's good that a chant isn't required. It's working properly.

There's no way I can allow Yuel to fight a monster like this.

I'm this afraid of it — so Yuel must be even more frightened.

"I'll gain some time, so escape for me!"

I have to act cool here. As her master.



Yuel turns in the direction of the city. She looks at the gleaming red slave crest in shock. Then, as the slave crest operates her body, she runs off while

repeatedly looking back. If she's by herself, Yuel should be able to make it back to the city.

I set my gaze upon the ogre before me. When I raise my mace, the ogre looks at me with great interest and comes to a halt.

This is fine. Even though it's a strong monster, its only weapons are its fists. And I can use healing magic. As long as I defend my head, I shouldn't go down that quickly. I'll gain time for Yuel to get further away.

I look at the massive ogre monster.

The wounds that Yuel had back at the slave market. Her constant vigilant appearance ever since we left the city. Her expression when she said she would fight, while her arms were trembling.

Looking at this monster, various scenes flash before my eyes.

I can feel myself getting fired up.

I know that I can't win if I try to fight it head-on. All I intended to do was buy time. But, if I use healing magic as we exchange blows, maybe by some chance I can pull out a win. That's the feeling that comes over me.

I want to defeat the monster that Yuel is frightened of; her trauma. That kind of feeling steadily builds up in me. Saying I want to become a girl's shield and battle a powerful monster, I may just be getting drunk on the atmosphere.

Even so, I still really want to defeat this monster. So that she doesn't have its shadow looming over her anymore.

First off, let's use Appraisal.

Armor Ogre (variant)

Apparently that monster is known as Armor Ogre. I was hoping to discover its weakness, but looks like it won't be so easy. Is it called 'Armor' because it has skin hard enough to deflect a mace? No idea what 'variant' means though.

For now, I'll hold the mace so it's always protecting my head, and slowly close the distance. Neither the Ogre's attacks nor mine can reach yet. Little by little, I creep closer to it.



The most important thing about fighting a monster is being ready to receive its attacks. It's important to keep in mind that I could receive an attack at any time, and keep healing magic prepared. With my healing magic, I can immediately recover from even a fatal wound. In theory, if I can just keep my head safe, I absolutely won't die. Even I should be able to fight it.

As I'm thinking that—

the Ogre looks at me with my weapon raised, and suddenly swings both arms.

Huh? There's still some distance between us. I'm outside the reach of its arms. What in the—

At that moment, something blade-like slides out from both of the Ogre's arms.

Springing out of each arm, something around 50cm long.

...Are those swords? No, claws?

Oh yeah, in the Appraisal results, it said that guy was an Armor Ogre variant.

...Are those the variations? With just a glance, I can tell that those large claws have extremely sharp points. And they're coming out of both of the Armor Ogre's arms.

.....This could be dangerous.

My head quickly cools down.

Those might be too much to handle. No, I'm pretty sure they're too much. Those claws are too much. Most likely, those claws are too much.

If it were fists, I could maybe endure them depending on how and where they hit me. But those claws are too much. They're not something I could somehow handle. I can only envision myself getting sliced in half. In other words, they're scary. Those claws are really scary. They make me think back to my trauma from the Giant Ant.

That reminds me, Yuel's face, it looked more like claws rather than fists that

did that. Right, yeah, it has claws, yeah.

I feel the balance scales in my head slamming to one side.

I should try to run away too after all.

A tactical withdrawal. I had a little bit of hope against those fists, but those claws are impossible. The hard skin, the brutally pointed claws, it's surely offense and defense in one package. I don't feel like I could possibly win head-on.

I got a little carried away by my own coolness, but looking at those claws cooled me off in a hurry. Right, I'm neither a swordsman nor a warrior. I'm an ordinary guy who can only use healing magic. I can't fight a monster like this. It would easily turn the tables on me, and that would only add to Yuel's trauma.

—While I'm still thinking about it, the Ogre swings one of its arms.

"E-Eeeek!"

I avoid a direct hit by diving to the side at once, but my billowing clothes get shredded.

This sharpness.

...It's great that I decided to escape, but the Ogre is right in front of me now. And I'm down on the ground from dodging.

I'm seriously gonna die within 5 seconds. No, more like 2 seconds maybe.

Isn't there something, anything I can do? I throw a rock from the ground, and it's struck by the Ogre. With one swing of its arm, the rock shatters into tiny pieces.

I remove some clothes from my item box and throw them at the Ogre's face. Before they hit its face, they're cut in half.

I fish around in the item box and come upon something good. It's the warm water magic tool I previously found in the labyrinth.

...Perhaps I can make use of this.

As I stand up, I aim the warm-water-emitting magic tool at the Ogre's eye.

The output is at best the same as a fully-open faucet. It's indeed a squirt gun. A trivial nuisance.

But, at point-blank range it would have an effect. Getting water in its eyes would be annoying, so the Ogre would protect them with its arms. For a moment, the Ogre would lose sight of me.

If the Ogre guards its face, I'll sprinkle water at its feet. The ground at its feet would turn to sludge. By just the slightest bit, I could slow down its pursuit.

This could work. It might just work.

Maybe because the ground is already muddy from yesterday's rain, but a small amount of water has a large effect.

Run away, run away, at any rate just run away.

But I can't forget that I'm buying time. It may be pointless to fight it head-on, but I at least want to eliminate the possibility of this monster catching up with Yuel.

I wonder if Yuel's alright? No, this is Yuel we're talking about, she could probably make it through even if she were surrounded by monsters. At least, she has a better chance of making it back to the city safely than if she was dragging me along. I have faith that she's safe.

I keep running from the Ogre. It comes after me, cutting down the branches and trees between us. Oh my god this is super scary.

T-This might be good enough. Although she's tired, at Yuel's pace, even after this short time she should have enough of a lead that this guy won't catch up to her.

This hose of a magic tool is plenty useful. I might not be able to shake off the Ogre, but it's seemingly possible to maintain a certain distance while running from it.

I can run from it. I can run from this scary monster with those brutal claws.

...But before I run away, I at least want to give this monster a good knockin'.

It's scary. That monster is certainly scary.

And yet, as I'm running, I think up something good. If this goes well, I may even be able to subjugate this monster; that good of an idea.

I flee through the forest, spraying water at the Ogre's face and the ground in front of it as I run.

The warm water from the magic tool can only reach a distance of about 6-7m. Due to the speed of my feet as well, the magic tool's effective range won't go any further than this. And if I fall, it's all over. I choose my steps carefully as I run. Avoiding mud, stepping on solid rocks as much as I can, jumping over tree roots, I continue running.

At which point a huge puddle appears in front of me.

Spraying water as I go, I keep running in circles around the same area. Due to yesterday's rainfall, there are puddles everywhere. And right before my eyes is a huge puddle, just wide enough to fit the Armor Ogre's body.

This is the place.

As I jump over the puddle, I drop something into it from my item box.

The thing that flies out from my item box is... Slime Jelly.

...I absolutely can't let Yuel see this method of fighting. No doubt about it, this is totally uncool. If Yuel asked me something like "Why do you have so much Slime Jelly?" I'd have no answer. This isn't the time to be bothered by such things, though. But I'm glad that I made Yuel run away.

The highly-soluble Slime Jelly rapidly dissolves in the water. It's a perfect instant trap.

Then, the Armor Ogre sticks its right foot into the puddle.

Its foot slips. Unable to stand firm, its right foot springs up. With comical ease, the Armor Ogre completes a half rotation. Shouting loudly, it sinks into the puddle head-first.

An ogre in a lotion pool. I really wish my opponent wasn't an ogre, but rather a beautiful lady.

The Armor Ogre struggles to free itself and stand up. But it will take some time for it to get back on its feet.

This is my chance.

If I'm going to get a hit on this monster, it has to be now. Being careful not to step into the puddle, I approach the Armor Ogre. Then, I raise my mace up high.

Where should I aim?

The Armor Ogre's skin is tough. A normal attack won't be fatal. Even if, for example, I swing this metal mace down with all my strength, I doubt it will deal a fatal blow to this guy.

In that case, it doesn't have to be fatal. It'd be great if I can prevent this guy from moving freely, even just slightly.

The difference between me and this guy is that I can heal my own wounds and it can't. With this blow, I'll prevent it from coming after me and Yuel. I'll prevent it from moving.

I want to aim for its eyes, but that's not possible. It'd be hard to smash both of them, and they're too close to its arms. It could most likely easily protect them with its arms, and the probability of a counterattack is high.

I aim for its ankle, at the joint there.

A joint has to be flexible in order to move, so that thick skin should be a little thinner there. Breaking its ankle would be best. Just fracturing it would be fine; just dislocating it would be fine.

I'll rob this guy of a fraction of his ability to move.

I cast healing magic on the arm holding the mace. There's no special significance to it, but this way even if I break a bone or tear a muscle, I can quickly repair it. It's not like it will increase the force. But I want to put every last bit of power that I can muster into this swing.

To the very end, I won't let the mace leave my hand. Strongly, firmly, I grip the mace.

Putting all of my body into the swing, I strike the Armor Ogre's foot with my mace.

Man, it sure is tough. The recoil nearly makes me let go. But my hand remains tightly gripped around the mace. Pain runs through my muscles, and my bones.

I quickly recover from it with healing magic.

—I feel the response from the mace biting into flesh.

Before the Ogre can hit me with a counterattack, I quickly distance myself from it. I move far, far away. Then a little bit further away.

20m away, hiding behind a tree, I observe the condition of the Ogre that's still struggling in the puddle.

"...How was that?"

After several seconds, the Armor Ogre crawls out of the puddle.

The Armor Ogre stands up and...

starts dragging its right leg.

"All right!"

I did it. I finally did it. With this, I just might be able to shake off this guy.

I dealt damage to its right leg. With that huge body alone, the burden on its legs must be quite severe. For a while, it'll most likely be difficult for that guy to move.

When I get back to the city later, I can just report this to the knights, and have them search the area. I'm sure the knight brigade won't ignore a monster that previously caused damage on the highway. Then I can request the knights to show Yuel its corpse. That way Yuel will no longer need to be afraid of it.

That monster that injured Yuel will invariably be subjugated. It's just that I won't be the one to do it.

Let's leave the fighting to the professionals, and entrust the monster to the knights. What I'm doing now is just limiting its movements somewhat and making it difficult for this guy to leave the area. Making it easier for me to run away is killing two birds with one stone.

In order to defeat this monster, it's fine if I use EX Heal in public. It's fine if I get hired by the knight brigade too. The next time we meet, I'll use my bottomless EX Heal freely and fight alongside a brigade of immortal knights.

Perfect. Well, subjugating it like this by myself would be best, but if it turned

the tables on me, that would just traumatize Yuel.

I should quit while I'm ahead. I mustn't overestimate my ability.

It's not like I looked at those claws and got scared of being hit by them or anything. I just considered the risk and chose the best available move.

If I were to drive my mace into that Ogre's head, I don't think it would be fatal. In order to deal a significant amount of damage, I would have to strain myself to my full power like I did earlier. Although I damaged its foot, the Ogre is still healthy. Its balance is bad, but it's still standing on two feet. I can only envision myself being killed by its counterattack.

Getting a good hit in satisfied my personal grudge somewhat. And I demonstrated my coolness in front of Yuel as her master. By dealing damage to its foot, I also laid the groundwork for the next step.

A temporary retreat is a strategic victory.

Turning my back on the Armor Ogre, I run.

I'm worried about other monsters, but I shouldn't be far from the highway anymore. I can more or less shrug off any damage and run through without stopping.

Right, maybe I can meet up with Yuel? Nah, that's impossible huh. If the slave crest is functioning normally, she should be considerably ahead of me. The slave merchant didn't do a great job of explaining it to me, and to be honest I have no idea how to cancel it either. I figure it'll probably fade once the order is carried out, though.

While I think about that, I run in earnest.

—At that instant, something impacts my back.

It knocks the breath out of me. Even though I should've been running, my feet don't reach the ground. My body is floating in the air. And starting to keel over.

Suddenly, something glittery enters my field of view. It's a spectacle I've seen very recently. A bracelet. A bracelet, shattering.

My momentum doesn't stop. I crash into the ground head-first and tumble along it.

It hurts. I can't feel anything below my back. I can't put any energy into my body. I can't breathe.

What happened?

Did the Armor Ogre catch up with me? No, I should've had a good 20m head start on it. It shouldn't have been able to catch up to me this instantly.

Then was there another monster hiding somewhere? I glance around, only moving my eyes.

—That's not it.

A rock. A bloodstained rock is rolling on the ground.

...From right behind me, a rock came flying.

Who did it?

When I look behind me, I see the figure of the Armor Ogre shaking its arm as it watches me.

I can't tell what expression it's making, but I can pretty much figure it out. That's rage.

....By damaging it half-assedly, I might have made that guy get serious. I screwed up.

My body is bleeding. My vision is growing dim. I can barely move.

Oh yeah, healing. I need to heal myself.

"...EX Heal!"

Along with warmth, strength rapidly returns to my body.

I'm okay, I'm okay. I can heal. If I stay behind trees, I should be able to get away somehow. In any case, let's run.

As I go to stand up, a stone smashes into the tree in front of me.

"...!"

Splinters of wood hit my body, and I lose my balance. I fall on my ass into a mud puddle.



The mud feels gross. Also my leg might be sprained.

But I don't have time to worry about that.

"EX Heal!"

I gotta run. I raise my head and use the tree beside me as support to stand up.

By the time I stand up, the Armor Ogre has already drawn near. Its large claws are extended above its head.

Its movements are faster than I expected.

What the hell, it can move just fine, can't it? My attack caused it some pain, but apparently not enough damage to limit its movements. Maybe it didn't reach the bone.

A claw strike is coming.

There's a tree at my back, so behind is no good. And I don't have time to evade to the side.

It's unavoidable. I don't have a bracelet anymore either.

—If I get hit directly, I'm dead.

Then, at the moment it swings down its arm, the Ogre's arm stops.

The Ogre's raised arm stops beside its head.

And then, the sound of metal. A light clinking sound rings out.

Hitting the Ogre's arm and falling to the ground, a single thin piece of metal.

...It's something I recognize; a knife.

The Ogre glances to the side. In its line of sight is a silver-haired young girl.

How? Why did she come back? The slave crest should have made her run away. As long as the slave crest is there, the slave can't disobey an order. That's how it's supposed to work. I have so many questions.



Yuel is pressing on her shoulder, gasping for breath as she watches the Ogre. And on her shoulder are countless stab wounds. It's as if the area where the

slave crest appeared was gouged out.

...Yeah, all the skin where the slave crest used to be is gone.

So there was a loophole like that?

...Perhaps it's a thing where slaves are ordered not to injure themselves, and then further orders are laid down on top of that?

"I'm sorry for disobeying your order."

Yuel mutters while looking at me.

"But I have no intention of running away by myself! I came this far with Master in order to protect you!"

Yuel exclaims. Then, she raises her knife.

## Chapter 38 – Battle

Showing no indication that she's bothered by the wound on her shoulder, Yuel quickly engages the Armor Ogre in combat. Like a bullet, she thrusts herself into the space between me and the Armor Ogre without hesitation.

A claw attack sweeps in from the side. A punch pulverizes a hardy tree. Even a glancing blow from one of the Armor Ogre's tempestuous attacks could very well lead to death.

Yuel continues to evade them.

She isn't just dodging. After I find an opportunity to treat her shoulder, she swings her knife at the Armor Ogre's joints, tendons, and eyes. Aiming for the places where its skin is thin, she finds openings to get in a few strikes.

The monster that dealt her the grievous wound that put her out of commission in the past is standing before her. Not faltering for a single step, Yuel is fearlessly battling it.

She saved me. I was in a really bad spot. Having the young girl I sent to safety come to my rescue instead is beyond pitiful, but she got me out of that predicament.

...And yet. And yet, this is hopeless.

Yuel slashes at the Armor Ogre's arm with a knife. However, the blade only etches faint lines.

Exercising her ability, Yuel stabs the Armor Ogre's side with her knife. However, the blade merely splits the skin lightly before it's stopped.

Yuel throws a knife at the Armor Ogre's eye. But that too is blocked by the its arm.

Yuel's attacks can't pierce the Armor Ogre's defenses.

I've realized that our offensive ability isn't high enough. For Yuel, she can earn time, but she can't defeat the Armor Ogre. Even if they keep fighting like this, it doesn't seem like Yuel will win. Even supposing there were some possibility that

she could pull out a win, it would no doubt be a protracted struggle.

And if she merely missteps once and gets her foot caught in the mud, or her fatigue reaches the limit, Yuel will easily be killed by the Armor Ogre. Above all, I absolutely can't let that happen. It's too dangerous for Yuel to challenge it in a drawn-out war.

What do we do?

Even at this point, do I take Yuel with me and run?

Nah, even if we try to run, there are those projectile stones. If we turn our backs, it'll easily get us with those. If Yuel's small body gets hit directly, there's even the risk of instant death.

Let her keep fighting?

It's hopeless, Yuel can't deal a decisive blow on her own. She won't get through that tough skin with her strength. Even at the joints, she can't pierce that thin skin deep enough to draw blood. At best, her knife would likely only puncture things like its eyes.

Yuel is surely aiming for its eyes already, yet when she goes to attack, the Armor Ogre immediately protects them. Destroying both of its eyes would be ideal, but the Armor Ogre won't allow its own weak point to be targeted so easily. Eating a single blow from the Armor Ogre could mean instant death. Even for the adept Yuel, getting past its guard and gouging out its eyes while still evading those attacks the entire time would most likely be a challenge.

We can't get away, and Yuel can't win. So what do we do?

...There is a way.

Perhaps Yuel has already come up with it even though I haven't said anything to her. It's something that simple.

"I should fight too."

Rather than Yuel fighting on her own, the two of us should fight it together. If I shoulder the responsibility of dealing with the Armor Ogre's attacks, Yuel won't need to evade them. She can move freely and attack however she likes. In the openings created when I lure its attacks towards me, Yuel can aim for the

Armor Ogre's eyes.

If we do that, there's a chance that even Yuel's attacks will get through.

I'm afraid of sharp objects. I'm even more afraid of huge monsters. But Yuel could be defeated by the Armor Ogre's brutal attacks at any moment. There's no time to hesitate.

I grasp my mace and approach the Armor Ogre. Pinned down by Yuel, the Armor Ogre turns its eyes to me.

"M-Master! Y-You mustn't! It's dangerous! Please get back!"

Yuel cries out anxiously, but the Armor Ogre's eyes are fixed firmly on my mace. From the Armor Ogre's perspective, compared to Yuel's knife that barely scratches its tough hide, my mace that caused it to limp (if only for a moment) should be the greater threat.

Just as I expected, the Armor Ogre turns away from Yuel to face me.

"Yuel, I'll draw its attention. Find an opening to destroy its eyes!"

This is my first time fighting alongside Yuel. Although I've watched Yuel fight from the back, I've almost never gone up front to join the battle.

I stand in front of the Armor Ogre. In front of that giant body with those thick arms and those sharp, dimly gleaming claws. Just standing before it, I feel my instincts crying out "run away, run away" in alarm. It must look even bigger to Yuel with her short stature.

...There's no way I can make Yuel continue to confront such a monster.

"B-But! What if Master...!?"

"Don't be unreasonable, Yuel. Believe in me. Yuel's master is not that soft!"

Well, it's not like I have enough combat experience to earn her confidence. Even so, Yuel slowly gives me a small nod. Yuel herself may understand in her innermost thoughts that this is the only way. And I suppose she's putting her faith in me.

It's not particularly like I'm not going to duel it to the death. I'm just going to

have Yuel attack it while I'm defending against one or two strikes. It's good enough if I just create an opening from the Armor Ogre.

I brandish my mace.

My target is its right foot. I have no intention to neglect defense and go all-out on the attack. It's mostly a feint, a strike with no power behind it. However, the Armor Ogre hastily raises its arm over its head, aiming at me.

...I guess that blow to its ankle must have really hurt.

I immediately bring the mace back and hold it out in front of me. In the first place, all I need to protect is my head.

The Armor Ogre delivers a blow using its physical strength. With terrific speed, the Armor Ogre's claw comes at me.

But I must not falter. I must not close my eyes.

Pay attention. I've always been observing Yuel's movements and they're faster than this.

The Armor Ogre's strike is certainly quick.

—But Yuel's movements are absolutely much sharper than this.

I can undoubtedly follow it with my eyes. Then it's fine if I just meet the Armor Ogre's arm with this mace.

Violently, the sound of metal rings out.

With the screech of scraping metal, the Armor Ogre's claw slides along the side of the mace. And its trajectory is deflected slightly. I feel a burning heat on the left side of my face.

I can't feel my ear. I'm getting concerned about what might have just happened to it.

But it doesn't hurt as much as that time my leg was bitten off by a Giant Ant. Besides, I'm still alive.

—Now's the time. The instant it stretches out its arm, Yuel moves behind the Armor Ogre.

Brandishing her knife from behind its back, Yuel is observing the state I'm in on the verge of tears. I signal to her with my eyes.

A silver flash streaks in.

Something pops with a *buchuri* sound.

"——!!!"

The Armor Ogre roars.

It shakes off Yuel, who's no longer holding her knife.

And there it is — Yuel's knife is thrust deep into the Armor Ogre's right eye.

She did it. Yuel sure is excellent. I really must pet the hell out of her after this.

The Armor Ogre lets out a howl and glares at Yuel with its remaining left eye. It's completely ignoring me. This time it's furiously trying to smash Yuel.

Yuel is strong. I just created a momentary opening, and she precisely destroyed one of its vital points. There's no mistaking that the Armor Ogre is being wary of Yuel.

But that's not where you ought to be looking right now.

—I tighten my grip on the mace again.

The Armor Ogre is surely in a fervor right now attempting to dull its claws on Yuel. The handle of Yuel's knife is sticking out of its right eye.

—I take a step towards the Armor Ogre.

Perhaps because its remaining eye is so bloodshot, the Armor Ogre doesn't notice me at all. It's focused on following Yuel's movements as she avoids its attacks.

—I wind all the way back with my mace.

My eyes meet with Yuel's as she continues to evade. She starts dodging further away from its attacks, leading it right in front of me.

—All of the muscles in my body flex.

Then, lashing out in vain at Yuel, the Armor Ogre passes in front of me. The handle of the knife sticks out of its right eye — and makes a perfect target for



my mace.

"Haaaaaaaahh!!!"

I feel the slightest resistance from it forcefully plunging into the flesh.

At that moment, the Armor Ogre goes stiff. Its legs that were pursuing Yuel come to a stop.

—Looking at the Armor Ogre's right eye, I see the end of the knife handle plunged deep into its eye socket. Looks like it's not so solid behind the eyes.

Then, like a snapped thread, that giant body flops over. The Armor Ogre collapses onto the ground.

"...D-Did we do it?"

The Armor Ogre doesn't move.

I try poking its foot from a distance with my mace, but once again there are no signs of movement.

...I-Is it really not going to move? I try lightly smacking the Armor Ogre's body with the mace.

Even still, there are no signs of movement.

"Master! Are your wounds alright?"

Yuel immediately rushes over. Still concerned for my safety, she confirms the Armor Ogre's condition, and exhales in relief. Looks like it really is dead.

Even the whites of its eyes are turned up, and its fingers don't twitch in the slightest. Perhaps because the only obvious wound is its right eye, I'm still afraid that it'll stand up even now, but there's no doubt that it's dead.

...We won. We held out.

All of my feelings of tension relax.

Then Yuel suddenly looks at my face in concern, and I notice that she's looking at the left side in particular. She looks really worried, staring at... the vicinity of my ear.

When I try touching it with my hand to check... my entire left ear is gone.

Eh, what's with this pain? It's super painful.

"H-Heal! Heal! EX Heal!"

I instantly regenerate it, but I have the feeling I added another trauma to my heart. Why do I just keep getting all beaten up like this? No, considering I only paid a single ear for the Armor Ogre's blow, I might've been lucky.

...Well, whatever. We're finally safe.

Then, when I go to tell Yuel that we should head home, I notice.

Yuel is focused, ears twitching, on a single point in the forest.

"...Master."

Yuel mutters with a slight quiver to her voice.

In front of Yuel's eyes... there's a wolf. Ten-odd meters away, a familiar wolf monster is intently looking our way.

Then, that wolf... howls.

Still? It's not over. Oh yeah, we defeated the brutal monster known as the Armor Ogre, but... we're still not out of the woods yet.

That wolf. Just before we encountered the Armor Ogre, we were fighting the same type of monster.

Don't tell me that instead of running away back then, they've been observing us this entire time? Aiming for

[the fisherman's profit](#), huh.

—From the right and from the left, new howls rise up.

I start to hear rustling through the underbrush from in front, from behind, and all around us.

The energy drains from my body. This is hopeless. We... might not be able to get out of this. We're completely surrounded.

The thicket sways, and a wolf's head pops out right ahead of us. As more time passes, their number continues to increase. In the blink of an eye there are more than 10 of them, and that's just the ones I can see.

The wolves don't immediately rush at us. As if they're cornering weakened prey, they slowly close in.

Yuel raises her knife... but the situation is grim. Even Yuel can't handle this many.

The wolves howl again.

Then once again there's the conspicuously loud sound of something else approaching. Fresh troops keep coming.

It's probably too naive to hope for both of us to make it out of this alive anymore.

But... I at least want to allow Yuel to escape. Raising my mace, I gather mana into my voice to order Yuel to run away—

—and just before it comes out.

At the limits of my vision, tearing through the tangled vegetation, I see something come running in a straight line towards us.

Red hair, fluttering in the wind. A shield in one hand and a longsword in the other.

"Huff.... hahhh... hah... I-I made it, I made it in time!"

Then she wedges herself between me and the wolves and slays one that was just about to spring forward.

"Indeed, by a hair's breadth."

The blue-haired adventurer looses an arrow that pierces a wolf right between the eyes.

"Hhhh... *sniff*... Fireball!"

A giant ball of flame generated by the blonde-haired girl instantly burns up a wolf.

Then, shortly after, there are multiple metallic sounds. Knights are coming to assail the wolves.

—It's the subjugation unit.

To my astonishment, in just a short time they exterminate the wolves one after another.

"H-Hey, you alive? You're okay, right?"

It's the red-haired girl in front of me. Ruruka greets me while patting down my body. Maybe it's because my clothes are torn here and there, but it kinda tickles.

"Y-Yeah."

"...Thank goodness we made it in time. Sheesh, I really panicked when your reaction disappeared, y'know?"

Apparently I made her worry. She must have come in quite a hurry, with how out of breath she is. Her breathing is suitably ragged.

We're saved. While we were fighting the Armor Ogre, we ended up moving pretty far from the riverbank, though. I didn't expect that any help would come.

"Ah, you're making a face like "How?". Look, didn't I tell you at the hospital? It's because I was lost in the forest earlier. I told you, I properly prepared for a disaster."

Ruruka laughs as she points to the earring on her right ear.

"This is a magic tool that comes in a set. Whoever's wearing the right one can tell the location of the one wearing the left one, y'see. The truth is, I bought it so that if I wandered off I could use you as a beacon to get back to the subjugation unit, but it ended up working out the other way, huh. When your reaction suddenly disappeared I really panicked, you know?"

...Oh yeah, the earring I got from Ruruka was attached to my left ear, wasn't it? With that blow from the Armor Ogre it must have disappeared somewhere along with the ear itself.

So that was the purpose of that item.

...Wasn't it out of opposition to me and Yuel having matching bracelets? Out of jealousy? I thought it was that sort of thing. Even though I should be happy we were saved, my feelings are somewhat complicated.

"T-That's... a designated subjugation target, Armor Ogre, isn't it?"

A female knight raises her voice, one that sounds kinda familiar. Who is that? Oh, that's right. It's the female knight who came to the hospital earlier. Marietta. She was with the subjugation unit too.

"W-With just the two of you...? This monster couldn't be subjugated that easily..."

Marietta expresses her disbelief.

"Master protected me."

And Yuel replies immediately.

...If I had to say who was protected I feel like it would be me though. But perhaps Yuel sees it the other way around.

Marietta looks at me in amazement.

"Master defeated it with his mace!"

Yuel heaps the praise on me. I start to see some respect in Marietta's eyes, too. It feels pretty good, though, so I won't deny it.

"Ooooh, this monster sells well, you know? Like these claws. I'm concerned that they're a little crusty, though."

That would be the dried Slime Jelly. Please don't worry about it.

"...Thank you for saving me."

I hear a soft voice that's barely a whisper. Looking over, there's Fran with swollen, bloodshot eyes. Now that I think about it, Fran's been sobbing this whole time. Sera is soothing her, but she seems to have an emotional personality whether it's positive emotions or negative ones.

You wish to thank me. While you're at it, I'd like you to share some of those thankful feelings with Sera-san over there and raise her opinion of me.

"U-Um, Shiki-san. Would you be willing to allow the knight brigade to take custody of those remains temporarily? As we must allow the client to confirm its condition. I think there will be reward money coming your way in the future, so please look forward to it."

"S-Sure."

I feel slightly concerned leaving the crusty corpse in their custody, but it's not an atmosphere where I can refuse. Well, precisely because it's crusty, they probably can't tell that it's Slime Jelly. Even if they do figure it out, they shouldn't go so far as to suspect the reason why I was carrying Slime Jelly on me.

"After a careful inspection of the condition of the raw material, if you wish, we can also buy it for a high price!"

...That's what I'd like to believe.

Carrying Yuel sound asleep on my back, we walk through the forest. Before even 20 minutes have passed, we make it out of the forest. Spreading out before my eyes is a vast, gently sloping plain. Paved with a road. It's the highway.

Together with a few knights and Ruruka's group, we walk along the road. Unlike when we left, there are considerably fewer people. There's only a few knights, one of the healers attached to the knight brigade, and Ruruka's trio.

When I ask about what happened after I fell into the river, it seems the knight brigade split into two groups after that.

One group became the search party, consisting of Ruruka's party who volunteered for it, a few knights including Marietta, and a single healer.

And the other group comprised the main force, with the rest of the knights, healers, and wizards. The main force apparently marched straight toward the city in order to escort the civilian healers. Also, it seems they had another reason to return to the city in a hurry.

As for the search party, they proceeded in a straight line toward the response from Ruruka's earring, and they finally caught up with us this morning as we were up against the wolf monsters.

"Hahhhh, it's broken. That earring."

Suddenly, Ruruka mutters apathetically.

After we collect the Armor Ogre's corpse, we also recover the earring which was an expensive magic tool, but mine was broken. It was split in half by the

Armor Ogre's claw.

Ruruka is really regretting that. Well, it was a fairly expensive magic tool.

...But there's one thing I want to ask Ruruka about that magic tool no matter what.

"Hey Ruruka, that earring, you gave it to me right?"

"Yeah? That's right, why?"

Ruruka answers with a quizzical expression.

"Even after this subjugation was over, you were going to let me keep it, right?"

"W-Well, that's right."

Ruruka's voice slightly raises in pitch. Perhaps she's already guessed what I want to say to her.

"...In other words, I wouldn't have had any idea that that earring was a magic tool, and you'd be able to determine my whereabouts at any time?"

Ruruka immediately stiffens. There's a brief silence.

"E-Eheheheheeh."

Then Ruruka leans her whole body cutely and gives me a sweet smile. Her deception is completely exposed.

...I can pretty much imagine what she was thinking. I bet she was thinking of "accidentally" running into me when I'm eating at the tavern and sponging a meal off of me, or encountering me in the labyrinth and getting free treatment, things like that.

That was dangerous. That was truly dangerous. If that earring hadn't been destroyed, and one day I slipped away from Yuel and Eris and visited the adult establishment recommended by Geyser, the odds that Ruruka would find out are fairly high. I wouldn't have a shred of privacy.

She casually did something outrageous to me. Well, that's also how we were saved, so it's not like I'll speak too harshly.

"L-Look, it's just a little further to the city! Once we're over that hill, we'll be

able to see it! "

Ruruka blatantly tries to change the subject.

But I guess what she's saying is true. We can finally go home. I spur on my tired body along the road. Then, at the summit of the gentle hill.

From that point, the high ramparts of the city of Merhatz come into view.

However, the cityscape that gives off the feel of a bygone era doesn't enter my vision.

Because there's something more eye-catching than that. Not even a hundred meters from the city, just a stone's throw away.

Over there, there's something one size larger than the one we subjugated. A Krankheit Turtle's corpse is lying there.



## Chapter 39 – Poison Mist

Less than a hundred meters from the city, a stone's throw away, a *second* Krankheit Turtle's corpse is laying there.

...While we were travelling along the highway, Ruruka's group told me the reason why the subjugation unit's main force separated from the smaller search party and hurried back to the city. Seems it was because they discovered a Krankheit Turtle egg.

Oh yeah, I have a feeling I saw it. Back when we were subjugating the Krankheit Turtle, that blackened egg that Fran burnt to a crisp with her area-of-effect magic.

Outside the labyrinth, monsters pair up, mate, and bear children just like regular animals. Which is to say, the fact that there was an egg means that there were at least two Krankheit Turtles within that forest. I didn't have time to think about it since I fell into the river, though, so it slipped my mind. But the existence of an egg must have been an unexpected bad omen for the knight brigade.

Sera told me this while we were on the march, but the Krankheit Turtle has the tendency to migrate during heavy rainfall. And yesterday evening, when we subjugated the Krankheit Turtle, it was really pouring down. Supposedly the knight brigade hurried back in case the second Krankheit Turtle was moving closer to the city.

As of yesterday evening, a number of the knights tasked with defending the city were off with the subjugation unit, so there were fewer of them around than usual. In particular, most of the healers attached to the knight brigade were sent out with the subjugation unit. Additionally, civilian healers in the city also answered the call for exceptional folks to participate in the subjugation.

The Krankheit Turtle is a special monster that's difficult to face head-on without healers periodically casting curative magic. Even if knights within the city managed to detect the Krankheit Turtle at an early stage, they might not have been able to subjugate it before it approached the city. That seemed to be

what they were concerned about.

And now, that Krankheit Turtle's corpse is lying mighty close to the city. That means their concern turned out to be right on point.

The Krankheit Turtle turned up at the city in search of prey, but they were short on healers. As a result, the knights were unable to fight it head-on due to the poison mist, and the Krankheit Turtle ended up getting that close to the city. That about sums up the details.

This situation is awfully unpleasant. The Krankheit Turtle scatters poison mist over vast distances. What will happen if such a monster gets that close to the city?

...The poison might might've spread inside the city.

"T-That can't be...!"

Seeing the corpse of the Krankheit Turtle right next to the city, Fran moans out. Her expression gives off an impatient feeling. She's stunned for a second, then seemingly makes up her mind and rushes into the city.

"Just a moment!? Fran! Wait right there!"

"Fran, calm down!"

Sera and Ruruka race after her. They enter the city with me hot on their heels.

...When I enter the city, things there are different from the usual Merhatz.

There's none of the usual bustling, cheerful commotion. The number of street carts and pedestrians is much lower than normal. Instead there are priests, in their characteristic monastic habits, and armor-wearing knights, busily running about.

And, along the streets of the deserted city, the hospitals. Those alone have gathered huge crowds.

"T-This is just..."

Among the knights of the search party, Marietta speaks out in surprise.

The city is in a bizarre state. The masses crying out anxiously, the knights

trying to manage the disorder, that's what the city has come to. It's especially awful around the hospitals. Looks like the townspeople have already come to understand the situation.

"We will head for the station immediately. We need to receive our next orders. I'm afraid the discussion regarding your remunerations will have to wait for another day, so please excuse us."

One of the search party knights speaks quickly. Time is precious, that's the kind of feeling he's giving off. They just returned from the subjugation, but the knights probably won't get any rest.

"Y-Yeah."

The city is just about on the verge of panic. Well, if they were battling such a huge monster so terribly close to the city, of course the residents would notice.

...I'm worried about Eris, running the hospital by herself. I need to hurry over to Eris' hospital.

When I reach Eris' hospital, unsurprisingly it too has gathered a crowd. It's never seen business booming quite like this. But Eris probably isn't happy about that. There must be 20... no, 30 people there.

...There's no way Eris can handle that many by herself.

I'm in front of the gates. I get a better look as I approach, and there's a knight in the middle of the crowd. The knight is raising his voice trying to restrain the people who are scrambling to enter the hospital first.

This is chaos. Perhaps the knight brigade has been dispatching personnel, simultaneously serving as security for the hospitals. I was worried that Eris would be getting shoved around by the crowd, but it seems that won't be an issue. I leave the knight to deal with the crowd, and use my key to sneak into the hospital through the back door.

It's the same hospital as always, and Eris is there.

Eris has her eyes closed and brows furrowed, casting healing magic on a single patient. However, it looks like she's struggling considerably. So much so that

she hasn't noticed me entering the hospital. Her face looks pale too.

...Eris seems to be out of mana already. I must come to her aid.

"Must be rough, huh?"

When I call out to her from behind, Eris gives a huge sigh of relief.

"Ah, Shiki, so you've returned. I presume you understand the situation since you came from outside the city, but the townspeople are in a panic due to rampant rumors that poison mist has spread inside the city. And because of that, I don't have any mana left, so... gah!"

Then she starts talking as she turns around, but once she sees my appearance her eyes snap open.

"W-Wait a minute! You're in tatters! A-Are you alright!?"

Eris' attention is on the habit I'm wearing.

...Oh right. I got carried away by the bizarre atmosphere of the city and utterly forgot. The clothes I'm currently wearing are blood-spattered, smeared all over with mud, and shredded.

Now that I think about it, even though the hospital has gathered such a crowd, nobody has solicited me for treatment. It may be in tatters, but I'm wearing a monastic habit.

...Don't tell me they saw me not as a healer, but as a homeless bum or something? It's lucky that I avoided getting bothered, but I have mixed feelings about it.

But there's nothing I can do about that. My change of clothes was bisected when I threw it at the Armor Ogre. I couldn't exactly return to the city wearing a habit that's completely missing all the fabric from the waist down. I wish I had put more clothes into my item box, but considering that there was Slime Jelly straining nearly 90% of the capacity, I wasn't able to.

"Ah, I'm fine now, no injuries."

Well, Eris is worried, but I don't have any injuries  
*anymore*

. For the time being, I give Eris custody of the still-sound-asleep Yuel and cast Heal and Dis-Poison on the customer in front of me. That should be good enough for the Krankheit Turtle's poison.

—I heard about the characteristics of the Krankheit Turtle's poison at the subjugation unit's strategy meeting. Although from what I heard, it sounded closer to bacteria than poison.

The features of the Krankheit Turtle's poison are as follows.

The Krankheit Turtle's poison mist contains a unique, slow-acting poison. Once exposed to the poison mist, after a certain amount of time has passed, the symptoms of a high fever occur. It's what Fran and Sera had earlier when they were bedridden.

The amount of time before symptoms develop varies depending on the amount of exposure. If you're in melee range of the Krankheit Turtle they can occur in less than a minute, but for a minor exposure it can take a long time for symptoms to develop. And depending on the amount of poison, they apparently may not occur at all.

And after developing a high fever, black spots break out all over the body as time passes, and if left untreated, death occurs within a week. That's the kind of poison the Krankheit Turtle produces.

...It's seriously vicious. For delayed symptoms to develop even from a small amount and so on, I'm convinced that the poison mist is actually a cloud of germs. And if the amount exceeds a certain level, the human immune system loses and the germs produce toxins throughout the body that cause the high fever. That's the kind of image I'm going with. I don't know a whole lot about things like bacteria, and in the end the knights didn't really understand and were saying it was a poison curse.

Well, that's all beside the point.

First of all, Dis-Poison is necessary to treat the poison, and it should be even better to add Heal which is effective at strengthening immunity and reducing

fever.

Changing places with Eris, I treat customers and new ones replace them. I steadily proceed with the treatment. I treat them one after another. Another one. Another one. And another one.

It starts getting tedious after 10 people.

"Eris, how long until this is over?"

"...It's not going to end. There's a rumor going around that a slow-acting poison mist entered the city... I don't know who started it, but a few hours earlier there were sounds of battle from outside the city, and a fog really did roll in to the city. This area is particularly close to the gates, so everyone's in a panic."

Assuming there's someone who spread the rumor intentionally, it's most likely one of the healers living in the city who knows about the Krankheit Turtle. In consideration of the profits it would bring to their hospital. Nah, once you develop a high fever from the Krankheit Turtle's poison you can barely move, so urging people to seek treatment at a hospital before that happens could be considered an act of goodwill.

"There are probably also a lot of people who don't need treatment, huh."

It could also have been because I treated her wound with Heal earlier, but unlike Fran and Sera, Ruruka didn't develop a high fever. If only a small amount of diffuse mist made it into the city and got inside buildings, symptoms wouldn't develop all that quickly. The fact that the city's inhabitants are panicky is likely because the Krankheit Turtle's poison is slow-acting and they don't know when symptoms might possibly develop.

"Mmm..."

And, as we're discussing such things, I hear a small moan from Eris' lap. Looks like Yuel is awake.

Rubbing her eyes, she stares at me in a daze.

"Master, where are we...?"

"Good morning, Yuel. It's the hospital. You really worked hard today."

I praise Yuel and pat her head. She looks around restlessly, then makes a tiny relieved smile.

–But that smile quickly turns solemn.

Yuel's eyes go wide; she's staring at a single point. Staring fixedly at my arm as I pet her head.

Each time my arm moves to pet her head, her pupils sway from side to side. What she's staring at is... my wrist.

Then, having confirmed something, she shifts her attention timidly to her own arm.

Yuel's expression darkens at once. It's as though she's lost something important. With that same expression, she keeps glancing back and forth between my arm and hers.

"T-The bracelets were..."

Then Yuel mutters in a quivering voice.

The bracelets. Oh yeah.

They shattered during our battle with the Armor Ogre. She didn't have the leeway to feel down at the time since we were engaged in combat, but now is different.

Yuel is such a delicate girl that she became gloomy just from losing a single cheap knife that I bought for her. So if it comes to breaking enchanted accessories? Moreover, to improve her mood at the time we bought those bracelets, I gave her a special feeling by saying that we matched. To Yuel, those were her important matching accessories with her master.

...I get the feeling it completely backfired.

"T-The matching bracelets, that M-Master and I bought for each other... they..."

Tears gather little by little in Yuel's eyes. But what should I do? What's broken is broken. Buy new ones? No, that doesn't undo the fact that those bracelets were broken. No doubt Yuel blames her own shortcomings for allowing the

bracelets to be broken in the first place.

"Gh...! Hh... uehhh..."

Yuel's head tilts back slightly, and her thinned lips start to quiver.

Not good, notgoodnotgoodnotgood. I can't let this happen. Crying. She's going to cry. At this rate Yuel is absolutely going to cry. No, she's going to weep.

Yuel played an active part in the recent Krankheit Turtle subjugation. She rescued me by herself when I fell into the river, and she gallantly came to my aid when I was about to be done in by the Armor Ogre. And she wrecked that very same Armor Ogre. She should be named the MVP this time.

But now Yuel is grieving. This is no good. She deserves a much better reward than this.

Someway, somehow, I need to do something. Isn't there something I can do? Anything...!

Oh yeah... I still have a trick up my sleeve.

I grab Yuel by the sides and stand her up. Then, as she's even now on the verge of tears, I grasp her hand—

"Yuel, come with me! Eris, we're going out for a bit!"

Heading out of the hospital, we run.

"Eh, w-wait! What about the hospital!? You're going out looking like that!?"

Eris calls out from behind, but I have to hurry now. Yuel is making a gloomy face, but she's not crying yet.

If she stayed at the hospital like that, she was probably going to cry. Yuel is today's MVP. There's no way I can let her cry. I need to distract her from the bracelets.

"Yuel, go south. First off, head to the southernmost point of the city. Once we get there, look for a spot with no people."

As we run through the city, I give Yuel instructions. Yuel makes a bewildered expression at my sudden behavior and directions.

"A-A place with no signs of life?"



But when Yuel seems to realize something, her expression brightens slightly. In this case what Yuel is thinking is probably completely different. But if it can temporarily cheer her up, I won't correct her misunderstanding.

"...Master, something seems odd about the city."

Yuel mutters as she runs when she notices the state that the city's in. She doesn't know about the Krankheit Turtle's poison mist entering the city, since she was asleep. I need to give her an explanation.

"—Yuel, right now this city is facing a huge crisis."

At my sudden announcement, Yuel looks puzzled.

So that Yuel can understand the gravity of the situation, I consciously lower the tone of my voice and continue talking as we run.

"A Krankheit Turtle. That monster with the poison mist that we subjugated, there were actually two of them. And before we got back, one of them attacked the city, and that poison mist spread all over town."

I doubt it spread all over the city. There should even be people who didn't take any damage. But urgency is important for this kind of thing.

Did Yuel understand the gravity of the situation? She nods seriously.

"Look, Yuel. At all those people who are seeking treatment."

Yuel looks at the crowd of people gathered in front of a roadside hospital.

Then she looks back at me expectantly. Seems like Yuel wants me to give them treatment. But, I ignore that and urge her forward.

Though she seems a bit bewildered, following my "go somewhere without people" order, Yuel enters a back alley.

"Yuel, you saw how tired Eris looked from using up all her mana, right? ...At this rate, treatment surely won't be able to keep up. Without a doubt, many people will die."

I doubt that very many people will die. They say that death doesn't occur until a week from the onset of symptoms, so between the knight brigade and the church they'll likely do something about it. Those who are unfortunately passed

over for treatment, those who are physically weak such as children and the elderly, and abandoned slaves like the former Yuel... those sorts of people may die, though.

When Yuel hears my words, she makes an extremely sorrowful face. Giving Yuel a sorrowful face is not my intention.

However, this is the necessary “staging”.

"Around here is good. Yuel, there's nobody watching us right now, right?"

Then, we arrive at a point deep inside the alleyway. It's a completely deserted location. Hereabouts should be good.

"R-Right..."

Yuel watches me with an anxious expression. With the city in the state it's in, why did I come to this back alley instead of treating people? She likely can't understand my reasoning.

I deliberately don't explain it verbally.

Instead, I invoke magic. With all my strength, I infuse it with mana.

"—Area Heal!"

At a tremendous speed, a warm green light extends far, far, far around us. The warm ball of light spreads over the tops of buildings, past the end of the alleyway, and even further beyond.

"—Area Dis-Poison!"

Once again, I gather mana and invoke a spell. A warm light of a slightly different hue drowns out the afterglow from Area Heal and extends into the distance.

"...!"

As far as I can tell from the afterglow of healing magic that hangs in the sky, the range of the effect is probably around 300m. I wanted to go a bit further, but it seems like area-type magic can't withstand any more mana than this. I feel a bit sick to my stomach.

However, it looks like this is the first time Yuel is seeing such large-scale area-

of-effect magic. Yuel's pupils quiver as she watches me.

I face her as she's in that state and make a resounding declaration.

"Yuel, from this point on I'm going to save the city."

Yuel's eyes are transfixed on me.

I don't know whether it's from seeing the healing magic or out of anticipation for what's going to happen from now on. But there's definitely excitement in Yuel's expression now.

"We're going to cast this healing magic on the entire city. If it's me, I can do it."

Casting healing magic on the entire city. There's a danger that my magical capacity and skill with healing magic will be discovered, but with area-of-effect magic of this scale, so long as I'm not seen at the moment I cast it, I doubt I'll be identified immediately. With such a giant area-of-effect spell, it shouldn't be that easy to determine where the center is or who used it.

But, well, it doesn't matter that this is a risk. I'll use this timing to put into words what I wanted more than anything to tell Yuel.

"And I'm able to save the city like this, because Yuel protected me all the way until we made it back... we may have lost the bracelets, but the only reason I'm here now is because Yuel kept me safe. The fact that my bracelet is gone is proof that it protected me."

"...! Y-Yes!"

Yuel is taken aback, and stares at her own wrist. Then she holds that wrist to her chest and crosses her other arm over it.

—The image looks as if she's holding an important treasure.

End scene.

...With this, the matter of the bracelets should be alright.

I doubt that it would've been effective if I just told her that while she was sitting in a chair at the hospital. No matter how many times I repeat the words, I

don't feel like it would be enough to console Yuel.

Letting her see the current state of the city, showing off my extraordinary healing magic. Then declaring that my healing magic is the only thing that can save the city now.

By putting on such a production, for the first time Yuel can truly believe that her actions led to saving the city. It will turn the very fact that the bracelets are gone into something she can be proud of.

And now that we've come this far, all that's left is to turn that into reality.

"But this is something that must not be discovered by other people. If bad people knew about my healing magic ability, it could be dangerous for me."

It's not like I'm doing something bad, but if it's discovered, on the contrary they might fawn over me.

...No, from a healer's perspective it would also be a source of income. I don't know what might be at stake, so it's safer to hide it in the end.

"And so that I'm not seen by people, Yuel's assistance is absolutely necessary. Won't you help me?"

Yuel nods in reassurance. Then, I tack on another comment.

"This will be my secret with Yuel."

Sharing secrets. Kids love that, right? And when I mention it, Yuel latches on and brings her face right up to mine.

"A-A secret just between the two of us!?"

"Huh? A-Ah... yeah. That's right, a secret just between the two of us!"

Although I say it's just between the two of us, it's a bit complicated. For instance, Eris seems to be aware of it. For instance if I, who can even use EX Heal, rush out of the hospital and come back having cast healing magic on the entire city, I expect she'll figure it out. I don't particularly intend to hide it from Eris, though.

Even excluding Eris, if by some chance I'm seen at the moment of invocation I

might be found out, but if that happens then I'll deal with it at that time.

Or perhaps even if I'm not found out here, if someday my healing magic ability is discovered via some other matter. If the fact came to light that I didn't rescue the citizens even though I could have, that would be extremely perilous. I can't imagine how much resentment I would garner.

Well, such a mercenary way of thinking also exists, but—

"—Area Dis-Poison! Alright, next is west, Yuel, let's hurry!"

"Yes!! Master!"

Yuel is having the time of her life.

With flushed cheeks, sparkling eyes, and an excited expression, Yuel runs on ahead.

This mood is like we're heroes of justice. And what we're doing now actually has that kind of feel to it. The fact that the bracelets were broken is surely already a distant memory.

From the south side of the city, we run west.

Sneaking down the city's alleyways, I invoke healing magic. This is also a chance for me to show off Master's grandeur in front of Yuel. Just by striking a cool pose at the instant I invoke the healing magic, Yuel's eyes are glittering. This is getting kinda fun.

From the west, we run north.

Every time I cast healing magic, Yuel cheers. However, at the same time I can feel my mana diminishing. It's honestly hard to keep running with my stamina, but we don't stop running around even as the sun sets. I cast magic from the back alleys, and we keep running at Yuel's pace as she guides me.

From the north, we run east.

My legs are already shaking, but I can't let Yuel notice that. However, this is harder than I expected.

I can sense my mana gradually diminishing. Perhaps that means the bottom of it has come into sight. Okay, casting healing magic on the entire city might have

been overdoing it. The anemic feeling makes my whole body feel heavy. Maybe I shouldn't have done this after all. I'm regretting it a little.

But, I won't earn Yuel's respect if I quit here. Saying I'm tired and leaving the rest for tomorrow would be too uncool.

Then, to the south. I'm feeling dizzy, but I completed a lap of the city through sheer willpower.

When we complete our circuit, there are no lines at the hospitals anymore. The warm light from healing magic and the sensation at the moment it goes off is distinctive. Anybody who's had healing magic cast on them before would recognize that it was healing magic and not ordinary luminescence.

The sun has already gone down completely.

My body is heavy. On top of running a lap around the entire city, I continuously fired off large-scale area-of-effect magic. It's the first time I'm feeling like this, but this must be mana deficiency. As expected, I don't want to use healing magic anymore.

Yuel's reaction was fun at the beginning, but I got worn out in a hurry. I return to the hospital on trembling legs.

In front of the hospital, neither the knight nor the crowd is there anymore. Instead, Eris is standing in front of the gates.

"Welcome home... seems like you did something incredible for us, huh."

She makes a brief comment.

I guess she figured me out after all. Well, it would be strange if she didn't. Yuel is grinning profusely, and I'm staggering. There's the matter of the timing, too.

Well, it's fine either way. Somehow, maybe from seeing Eris' face, I feel relaxed all of a sudden.

Then, when I go to enter the hospital — my legs get tangled unexpectedly. Maybe due to fatigue, I can no longer support my body. I'm falling.

"Master, watch ou...!!"

"W-Wait... kyaa!"

Right before I collapse, I feel something very soft. My head plunges snugly between Eris' plump, voluptuous, soft, meaty breasts.

Yuel makes a small cry as she inhales sharply. But I don't move. Not for any indecent reason, but because I really am exhausted to the limit.

Somehow it seems I've fallen onto Eris as if I'm pushing her down. I feel the soft sensation of Eris' breasts from both my hands and my face. For sexual harassment like this I expected to be knocked to the ground, but Eris makes no sign of movement.

It's no good, I'm so sleepy. My stamina and my mana reserves are both empty. I really overdid it today.

My eyelids are heavy. As I feel the sensation of something pulling hard at the hem of my clothes, I lose consciousness.

## Chapter 40 – Reward

So soft. So squishy. I awaken to a supple sensation in my palms.

When I open my eyes, I'm in the usual bedroom. And in front of my eyes is a sleeping Eris, still wearing her habit. She's breathing softly, and her eyes are closed. Eris always carries herself with a mature air, but her sleeping face looks rather innocent.

Then, when I lower my gaze a little — my hand is buried deep within her cleavage.

...Why am I rubbing Eris' breasts?

Moreover, when I quickly inspect my own appearance, there's something off about my attire. I'm wearing pants, but my upper body is bare. What in the world is going on?

I'm half-naked, sharing a bed with a defenseless, sleeping Eris.

Only one conclusion can be derived from such a thing. Eris and I must have crossed the line. By which I mean, Eris must have been charmed when I nobly saved the city with Area Heal and straight-up invited me into her bed. Well, I have no recollection whatsoever of that, though.

But even so, wow they're soft. I mean, of course I wouldn't be so impolite as to grope Eris' breasts while she sleeps, it's just that my hand is caught between them and I can't seem to get it out very easily. I try moving my hand in various ways to get it out, but it's no use. Ahh, I can't get my hand out. My hand's reaaally stuck in there, huh.

As I'm doing that,

"Nnh..."

I hear a little sigh. If I had to say where I heard it from, it was no doubt from slightly above my eyeline; from Eris' mouth.

...I don't want to look away from Eris' breasts and up to her face. But there's no way I can't look. Timidly, I try raising my eyes. Eris' sullen gaze is fixed upon



my hand.

"W-What a refreshing start to the day. A pleasant morning to you, Eris-san."

It would seem she woke up.

Let's review the current situation. I've crawled into Eris' bed half-naked and now I'm feeling up her breasts. It was an act of God, but the fact remains that I'm touching what I'm touching.

...First let me hold my tongue back so I don't bite it when I get slapped, and while I'm at it let me get ready to *dogeza* too.

"...Come on, if you're awake then could you move? Or else I can't get up."

"I-I'm so sorry! ...Wait, huh?"

All Eris did was ask me to move. That's... she's not mad? Even though I put my hand on her breasts, *that* Eris isn't mad. What the heck happened?

Don't tell me something actually happened between me and Eris yesterday? I don't remember it at all, though.

Taking a really good look, is it me or are Eris' cheeks slightly flushed? ...M-Maybe if I try rubbing her breasts a bit more my memories will return. And I might recall something if I try unfastening her chest buttons.

—While I'm lost in thought, Eris' look quickly turns severe.

"Just so there are no misunderstandings, after you fell asleep you latched on to my... outfit, and wouldn't let go. So I gave up and put you to bed like that... so please, stop making that disgusting smirking face."

"...I-I'm not making a face."

Eris smacks my hand away and raises her upper body. Then she lightly rubs her temples and speaks.

"Your garment wasn't wearable anymore, so Yuel-chan cut it off for you. I couldn't have you going to bed like that, that's all. There was no other motive."

I see. No, be that as it may, would Eris really sleep in the same bed with a man in my state? Well, Eris might have just taken pity on me after seeing how exhausted I was. And casting Area Heal on the city likely left a favorable impression on her. Although the fact that she was looking at my hand and sighing may mean her impression of me took 3 steps forward and 2 steps back.

"N-Now that you mention it, where's Yuel?"

"She's right there, isn't she?"

I follow Eris' gaze. Now that I get a good look, she really is there. Yuel is looking up at me from under the blanket. Only half of her face is visible beneath the blanket.

Apparently Yuel was awake too, as she's staring intently at my hand that was groping Eris' breasts until just recently. Peering into her pupils, I sense hints of carnage.

—Suddenly, I hear the ringing of the bell that announces a hospital visitor.

Two days later, Yuel, Eris and I are heading to the lord's manor.

As for when I groped Eris' breasts two days earlier while Yuel was watching, what gave me an opportunity to escape from that awkward situation was the female knight Marietta from the knight brigade, ringing the visitor bell. After that I fled as fast as I could from the bedroom where Eris and Yuel were, and heard what Marietta had to say. The gist of her message was that the lord had opened his manor to the subjugation unit for a dinner party in recognition of our services, and I was invited. The monetary reward for the healers who participated in this latest Krankheit Turtle subjugation will be given out at that dinner party, so by all means they urgently desired me to attend.

And, today is the day it takes place.

"H-Hey, is it really alright for me to attend as well? I didn't participate in the subjugation, so I feel like it would be inappropriate."

"The knights are bringing their families too, so why not? There shouldn't be

any problems."

"...! I-Is t-that so..."

Eris is feeling somewhat reserved, but having said that, it is a dinner party sponsored by the lord. It's not like we'll be hobnobbing with aristocrats, but even so, it'll probably be luxurious. I bet they'll serve crab and stuff.

It would've been fine for only me and Yuel to go, but leaving Eris by herself would be problematic too. While Yuel and I are enjoying the banquet, I can just imagine Eris restlessly picking over a cold meal all alone back at the hospital.

"Master, we've arrived!"

As I think it over, we continue down the road and reach our destination.

Located at the very tip of the north side of town, the lord's excessively huge mansion.

I hand my invitation to the knight in front of the gate as we enter. When we do, a Maid-san wearing a tidy maid outfit promptly guides us to the dining hall. I can't ogle her too much in front of Yuel, but she's a genuine maid. I want one for my own home.

The dining hall that we're led to looks spacious enough to comfortably hold a hundred people or so. There are knights and some women and children that are most likely their families, wizards and healers... and Ruruka's group, too.

"Ah, Shiki! Over here, over here! There are some delicious meat... dishes..."

When Ruruka sees me, she energetically waves her hands and calls out to me. However, her high spirits are short-lived. When her attention shifts behind me, her voice gradually withers. Following Ruruka's line of sight, she's looking at Eris.

Seeing Eris, Ruruka makes an ambiguous smile while scratching her hair. She looks extremely uncomfortable. And Eris, for some reason, is looking at Ruruka with a slightly envious expression tinged with resignation.

I wonder why? I guess Ruruka is self-conscious about getting all those discounts at the hospital. She always ran away as soon as Eris showed up, so this might be the first time she's coming face-to-face with her in a place where

she can't run away like that.

But I don't understand Eris' attitude. Rather than being angry, Eris is looking at Ruruka dejectedly for some reason. Even though the usual Eris would give her a sharp glare.

Next to Ruruka, Sera is making a gentle smile. After that is Fran, nervously biting her nails for some reason.

When Fran looks my way, she immediately hides her face. After that she hurriedly whispers something in Sera's ear, and Sera listens and nods in amusement.

What's with that? I mean, wasn't Fran kicked out of the lord's manor after that marriage interview crotch Fireball incident? Why is she here? Wait, this event is to recognize the services of the subjugation unit, so it might not be unnatural to make a one-time exception for that.

A short while later, escorted by an elderly butler, a lone middle-aged guy enters the dining hall. When the knights notice, they stand in unison.

"Ah, nonono, it's quite alright, please sit."

The beaming, forty-something older guy speaks in a light tone.

*That*

is probably this city's lord. A kindly middle-aged man wearing a gentle expression.

For some reason, when Fran sees the lord, she unconsciously begins to shake violently, in stark contrast to those luxurious twin drills. The lord converses a little with the knights, then he walks over to my side.

"I've heard about you from my daughter as well. It seems you risked your life to rescue my daughter, did you not?"

"Huh? Ah, yes. I only did what was natural..."

Apparently the details of the Krankheit Turtle subjugation have already reached his ears. Now that I think about it, I suppose it looked like I offered my body in order to save the lord's daughter from falling into the river.

"Hah hah hah, I see, I see, what was natural! No, that is truly wonderful. Today is a fine day. By all means, eat as much as you like. The softshell turtle and Orc liver in particular are exquisitely fresh!"

The lord nods enthusiastically to my reply and smacks my shoulders while recommending various dishes.

What's with this lord? He's overly friendly. Well, since he's going out of his way to hold a celebration for the subjugation unit, the noble blood must not have clotted up his mind all that much.

"F-F-F-F-Father, over there, why don't we go over there? There is some superb wine over on that side. A cask, let's go with a cask!"

While I'm pondering, Fran leads the lord somewhere else while spouting nonsense. I wonder if an older guy like him won't polish off the whole barrel.

Avoiding things like softshell turtle and Orc testicles, I assemble a suitable meal. Suddenly, a lone knight comes out in front of us and speaks up.

"We will hereby deliver the remuneration to those who lent us their assistance. Come forward as you are called."

Looks like it's time to receive our rewards. The knight reads off a list of names, and one by one people in healer-like garb walk up to the knight. Then, checking against the list of names, the knight presents them with bank cards.

I wonder just how much I'll receive? I made a killing not too long ago by overhunting the Huge Slime, but that's not possible anymore. I'm hoping it's a lot. I'm hoping it's a hell of a lot.

"Finally, Shiki-san. Come forward."

Just when I'm getting fairly nervous that my name won't be called, it is. The knight proceeds to read off the paper he's holding.

"Ehhh, for accompanying the Krankheit Turtle subjugation, 100,000 Zeni."

...Cheap. It doesn't quite meet my expectations.

That's my immediate reaction, but when I think it over is it something like this?

That Huge Slime overhunting probably just threw my money sense out of whack. 100,000 Zeni, that's close to a tenth of what Eris' hospital was worth, and I'm making that for one or two days of labor. I feel like that's a considerably large sum of money.

And, while I'm mulling that over, the knight in front of me makes eye contact with the lord.

"Furthermore, regarding your heroic conduct in risking your life to rescue Fran-sama, Lord-sama personally awards you 500,000 Zeni."

Then an addendum comes.

"O-Oohhh!?"

All at once, quintuple the amount. Ain't that a bit much? But well, that lord seems to dote on his daughter in his own way. Even though it must have been a huge disgrace when she roasted her noble partner's nethers at the marriage interview, her only punishment was temporarily being evicted from the house. I can't say I don't feel like that was lenient. Moreover, he even let her bring Sera along as an attendant. He must treasure his daughter a great deal. I can tell that much from the sweet smile the lord is beaming at me. I don't want to look at a forty-something guy's smile, though.

Man, that knight has a loud voice. What's with that? I've been feeling somewhat uncomfortable since earlier.

Then the knight once again glances at the lord, and as if playing to the room, announces sums of money.

"And the raw materials such as the skin and claws from the Armor Ogre come to 600,000 Zeni. The remuneration from the knight brigade for slaying a designated subjugation target comes to 300,000 Zeni. And the bounty from the Slave Merchant Union on the Armor Ogre comes to one million Zeni."

"O-Ohhhhh!?"

Addendums keep coming over and over.

Was *that*

such a formidable monster? Given that it's such a large amount of money, the

surrounding knights start to murmur. From the seat behind me, a conspicuously pleasant voice arises. That's Ruruka's voice, no doubt about it. I bet she intends to mooch.

"All totaled, it comes to 2,500,000 Zeni. Please receive it."

"O-Oohhhh..."

Okay that's a ton of money. A huge sum. I receive the bank card with the money and hurriedly return to my seat. All at once I've become slightly rich. This is more than enough money to buy a house. What do I do? What do I use it for?

"Oi oi, looks like that Armor Ogre was subjugated. Ain't he stronger than you? Even though yer a knight."

"Come on, give me a break. It may look that way, but I got good results at the knight school, you know?"

A little ways off, I overhear a conversation between an older knight and one who looks like a newcomer. Did Yuel hear their voices? She's looking at me with radiant eyes.

...The one fighting the Armor Ogre was mostly Yuel, though. But Yuel may have neatly wiped that from her memory. I have a feeling the scene transformed into Master with a mace in one hand, effortlessly mowing down the Armor Ogre.

Well, whatever. I earned money. I earned Yuel's respect too. Without a doubt I can call this Krankheit Turtle subjugation a success. I set into my meal in a good mood.

After hearing the size of the reward, Ruruka overtly comes snuggling up to me, and I deal with her appropriately. I'm trying to get the oddly melancholy Eris to eat something when I realize that it's almost time for the dinner party to end.

Then, just when I'm thinking of leaving... that middle-aged lord calls out to me.

"Howzit, 'njoying th'food?"

"...Ehh, well, yes."

His face is red, and his breath reeks of liquor. Seems like Fran made him drink a lot; his legs are shaky. He's totally drunk.

Then the lord leans on me, putting his arm around my shoulder. His expression is thoroughly exuberant, as if to say he can't help it. That expression is fitting for Yuel. I don't want to see such an expression on a middle-aged man. I may have saved his daughter, but no matter how you look at it this sense of distance is way too close.

"F-Father. Perhaps it would be best to retire. Please, to your bedroom."

Looks like Fran is uncomfortable with the drunken lord's behavior too. She's anxiously trying to put him to bed.

"Nonono, 'fore that we needta have a tahhk."

His voice is inarticulate and difficult to understand.

"...A talk?"

However, the lord's eyes are clearly focused on me.

"Yer gonna take Fran off m'hands, right? As fer th'weddin' date, 'm fine with whenever."

Abruptly, out of nowhere, the lord utters those words.

".....Huh?"

Letting out a bewildered and dumbfounded voice, my eye twitches as I notice Fran quickly cover her face in the distance.

What the hell did this middle-aged lord just say? Something about a wedding?

"Ahh, the cat is out of the bag."

Seeing Fran acting like that, Sera giggles.

"...Eh? Wait, eh, marriage!? W-Wait a minute, Fran! T-T-T-That's impossible! I haven't heard anything about this!?"

"M-Marriage... hey Shiki, w-what's the meaning of this?"



Ask me all you want, I have no idea. I haven't heard a thing about it.

"Master is... g-getting m-marr..."

Yuel also latches onto my sleeve and gazes at my face with an uneasy expression. This can't be happening.

"I-I haven't heard anything! I haven't heard anything about this, so I don't know!"



"...Hahhh?"

This time, the lord raises a hysteric voice. His mouth flops open and he's looking at me as if he doesn't comprehend.

"Huh? Eh? What's going on?"

Ruruka also questions me. I don't know. I want an explanation. Just who should I ask? Neither I nor the lord know, so...

Naturally, all attention centers on Fran.

Looking down and clenching her skirt, Fran trembles. Her mouth is slightly opening and closing as if she's hesitating over something.

"Errr, ummm..."

Fran looks out over the room and back down again. Then, she takes a brief glance at me. Hanging her head in resignation, she slowly opens her mouth.

"...That's... this is... a m-misunderstanding."

And mutters that.

"...In other words, Lord-sama over there mistook our relationship, and against your better judgment you gave in to temptation and ran with it. Is that about right?"

"Yes..."

Conscious of all the eyes on her, Fran trembles as she tells us what happened. In a nutshell, it was apparently a misunderstanding by the lord.

It all started the day before yesterday. The lord received a report from the knights of the subjugation unit's main force when they returned to the city. At that time he apparently heard the story that "the man who put his life on the line to rescue Fran from a crisis has gone missing". Fran's personality being what it is, there aren't exactly any men who have a favorable impression of her. Basically the only people who would risk their lives to protect her are the knights, and that's because it's their job. Meanwhile, an ordinary healer with no such obligations went and did such a thing.

At that point, the lord ended up jumping to the conclusion that Fran and that healer were in a serious relationship.

In actuality, I didn't expect that I would fall into the river myself, and I only saved Fran because I was completely confident that I could outrun the Krankheit Turtle. The fact that I fell into the river was only because I didn't anticipate that the ground would crumble.

However, the lord misconstrued it. He assumed that his man-hating daughter had gotten close enough to a male that he would risk his life to protect her.

Then the search party came back to the city. Fran, seeing the disaster that befell the city from the poison mist, headed to the lord's manor to see if there wasn't anything she could do. At which point the lord brought up the talk about me.

When that middle-aged lord learned that I was safe, he apparently laughed out, "the city is in a crisis, but that alone is a relief!" in delight. And Fran couldn't correct his misconception.

Then, when he ran with it and decided to let her return home, she didn't dare tell him the truth. Even when she consulted with Sera, Sera told her that it would be fine as long as she didn't say anything.

So she reluctantly went along with the flow, it seems. I thought that Ruruka's party at least had one sensible person in Sera, but apparently I was wrong.

Then Fran takes a quick glance at Ruruka before opening her mouth again.

"B-But! It's not as though I really wanted to get married... and well, look, he isn't my type."

Is this bitch insulting me? Or rather, I'm surprised that this man-hater even has a taste in men.

"But I like Master's face?"

However, I'm in front of the super-cute Yuel. As an adult here, I ought to calmly offer a few words of reproach.

"It's no good thinking that it's fine to lie so long as you don't get caught. Put yourself in our shoes. The ones who are lied to will surely be hurt."

"CComing from you..."

Whoa, I forgot that Eris was there. Seems like she wants to say something.

"W-Well, everybody makes mistakes. Look, Fran. C-Continue your story."

At my urging, Fran hesitatingly loosens her tongue.

"Errr... I thought to allow a day to pass for things to calm down before I told the truth, but at that time the knights... everyone was in a festive mood... and I couldn't bring myself to say it."

Now that I think about it, they brought Fran along on the Krankheit Turtle subjugation. The people around her, particularly the knights, might often be told to do unreasonable things. It's great that she was saved this time, but what if Fran had lost her life? Surely the knights would have taken the blame. Wanting her to get married and calm down, perhaps even the members of the knight brigade had that same intention.

"...I fully understand the story."

Then, the lord who had been silently listening the whole time opens his mouth. Fran's shoulders quiver in fear.

"I thought to have you go outside, make contact with a variety of people and broaden your horizons, but for it to come to this... I thought that at last, my daughter would finally be getting married..."

The middle-aged lord rubs his brow with a worn-out face. However, he appears to consider something and changes his expression as he opens his mouth.

"...Although, it would appear that it was not completely in vain. Previously, my daughter would have flown into a fit at the mere mention of marriage. Shiki-kun, was it? If you need anything of me, do not hesitate to ask, so please take care of my daughter from now on as well."

"That's a little..."

I'd prefer to refuse. I mean, she's flat-chested. And that personality.

"You have good eyes. Sincere eyes. Moreover, you subjugated that Armor Ogre, did you not? I can tell, you are well-trained."

I fully understand that yer goddamn eyes are blind. The middle-aged lord looks my body up and down as if assessing me.

...No, maybe this is something else. The middle-aged lord's face is bright red, and there's something off about his articulation. By some chance, isn't his perspective just unsteady—

And, the moment I think that, the middle-aged lord abruptly collapses.

"F-Father!?"

When I look closer, the middle-aged lord is sleeping, seemingly having fainted. I guess he drank too much alcohol after all?

...No, it might just be from anxiety.

Such a monster as the Krankheit Turtle turned up at the city. He thought he'd be pursued to deal with the poison mist, then some mysterious wide-range healing magic treats every single person in the city. Judging from Fran's story earlier, they don't yet seem to know its origin, but the matter still needs to be investigated. And amongst all that, there was this marriage mix-up.

As for the investigation... well, I don't think I'll be found out. I had a completely recovered Yuel avoiding public notice, so that wide-range area-of-effect healing magic should forever remain a mystery.

...Even if it was from anxiety, I wouldn't know. It's not my fault.

## **Volume 2 LN Side Story – Everyday Life in the Labyrinth City**

It's a few days after I purchased Eris' hospital.

Eris prepares breakfast in a chipper mood and casually starts a conversation.

"I'm thinking of tidying up today."

"Tidying up?"

Tidying up. Cleaning. Throwing out the trash.

I suddenly recall the other day when I placed a corpse of one of those spiders that Eris hates in the bathroom.

Throwing out the trash in this hospital. In other words, throwing out the trash that is me, is that what she means?

"Look, isn't this house quite spacious? Before you repurchased this house, it hadn't been cleaned for a week. It's getting a little dusty."

Nope, looks like what Eris wants to do is literally sweeping.

Since she's expressly informing me, maybe she's even planning to do a spring cleaning for the hospital.

I mean, it is two floors tall, and fairly large.

It's probably gonna take a full day of work.

"Under these circumstances, I think we ought to do a thorough cleaning – behind the furniture, under the floorboards and so on. That's why I would appreciate your help as well."

"I-I will help too!"

"Even under the floorboards?"

Looks like she's really going all-out.

Yuel seems pleased at the thought of being useful; she expresses her enthusiasm too.

But man, I'm a little concerned.

I wonder why it's happening with this timing?

A few days have already passed since I bought back the hospital.

With Eris' personality, if she thought the hospital had become dirty, she would have started cleaning it immediately.

And it's not like we've been especially busy lately, on the contrary, no customers are coming and there's been plenty of downtime.

Enough so that Yuel and I went on a stroll in the labyrinth to kill time.

I don't mind helping with the cleaning, though, since I live here too.

"Not that it matters, but what made you decide to undertake such a major cleaning anyway?"

Since it was bothering me for some reason, I try asking.

When I do, Eris' body abruptly shivers. This atmosphere, it's almost as if she recalled something unpleasant.

"Y-You won't laugh?"

She timidly inquires, trying to spy out my expression.

It's unusual seeing Eris like this. Whaaat, don't tell me it's something she's embarrassed about?

"Y-Yeah."

Then, making a slightly disgusted face, Eris begins to speak.

"Well, you see, in the bath... there was a huge spider."

It was my fault.

Once we finish breakfast, we get right down to cleaning.

Looks like Eris plans to have us exterminate all the spiders in this hospital.

She must really hate spiders. I might have done a bit of a bad thing to Eris. I'm not really reflecting on it, though.

Well, setting that aside, we're starting from the second floor bedrooms.

For starters, after changing into clothes that I don't mind getting dirty, I cooperate with Eris to carry the beds and chests of drawers out of the room. Once most of the things in the room are carried out, Yuel brings in a dust cloth and a bucket full of water.

"Thank you, Yuel-chan."

Eris takes the dust cloth from Yuel and soaks it in the water bucket.

...But, I suddenly realize.

"Eris, are you fine with wearing that habit? Wouldn't it be better to wear something you don't mind getting dirty?"

Eris' outfit is her usual monastic habit.



Does she really intend to do the cleaning in that?

It seems like she sweeps under the beds periodically; it's already clean there to a certain degree, but the amount of dust that was under the chest of drawers is awful.

If she tries to clean places like that in her usual clothes, they'll get dirty right away.

When I point that out, Eris pulls a little on the cloth around her chest as if it's bothering her as she replies.

"Ahh, it's fine if these get dirty. These are clothes I used to wear when I was around fourteen years old, so they're getting a little small."

...To still have clothes from four years ago, you sure take good care of your things, Eris-san.

Although I think there are issues with forcing yourself to wear clothes that are too small.

The instant I think that, Eris stoops over to wring the dust cloth.

Eris' voluptuous breasts and ass that are sexy even under normal circumstances get even further emphasized to a ridiculous degree.

Eris herself doesn't show the slightest sign of it bothering her, though.

I don't know if she's frugal or just stingy, but either way I think she should be a little bit more mindful of the gazes of the men around her.

Wait, thinking of it the other way around, if she isn't conscious of it then maybe I can look as much as I want. Okay, it's fine for her not to be mindful.

"C-Clothes from when you were... fourteen..."

Since we're in front of Yuel right now, I can't keep looking directly at Eris' tits and ass too much, but I don't mind one bit if Eris becomes more careless about herself.

I will only profit.

"...Just, two years... in two years, to that size..."

...I won't pay any mind to Yuel muttering something while she looks at her

own chest.



Yuel is only twelve, but still, she's already twelve.

For girls whose breasts are especially large, it wouldn't be weird for a portion of that to have developed already by her age.

However, Yuel is almost flat.

Even in two years, she probably won't have the kind of giant tits to fill out those clothes.

There's nothing to work with that could possibly comfort Yuel.

In the overwhelming presence of Eris' formidable funbags, as you'd expect, it'll be difficult for me to provide convincing support.

I'll pretend I didn't hear her.

"C-C'mon, aren't we gonna clean! Since we're doing this, let's start from the ceiling down!"

"T-That's right. This is a rare opportunity, so why don't we clean the ceilings as well? Err, in that case I will need something to stand on."

"...I will go get it."

Muttering weakly, Yuel trudges off to fetch a stool.

...I'm kinda starting to feel like it would be more merciful to have her give up on the whole big boobs thing already.

"Alright, would you mind holding the stool for me? I'll sweep as much of the ceiling as I can reach, then let's move it to clean the next spot."

"Sure."

Following Eris' instructions, I hold the step stool.

I hold the stool in place, then Eris climbs up on it and sweeps the area of the ceiling she can reach with a duster. Then we move, and repeat the same process.

It's simple work, but for the sake of spending our days amicably, it's necessary work.

Nevertheless, this is about what I expected for a building managed by Eris.

All of the places that are visible are mostly free of dust.

As I'm thinking about that while I hold the stool and look up at the ceiling, a certain something abruptly enters my field of vision.

Above my head.

Up there, Eris' overwhelming underboob is jiggling back and forth.

I can't look. Yuel is next to me right now.

She's wiping the room's windows, but she's also paying attention to me, glancing over.

In front of Yuel, I mustn't do something like stare at this stunning underboob on Eris.

But man, it's sticking out like a fringe.

Every time Eris stretches out her body to dust the ceiling, her chest squashes against her taut shirt, stretching it out.

Then when she relaxes her body, they shake as they return to their original shape.

What an outrageous spectacle. A bonus for me.

No, wait. I can't look.

Just like I'm watching Eris, Yuel is watching me right now.

I'll be gauged on whether I choose her respect or Eris' erotic curves.

Right, I'm being tested.

...I can't win against underboob.

I'm desperately trying to calm my heart by picturing Geyser's face, but my gaze keeps getting drawn there no matter what.

I'm not staring for a long time, though, so I don't think Yuel will find out. I hope she doesn't. Even if she does, I could likely mislead her about it.

In that rhythm, we finish sweeping the second floor including the bedrooms, and head to the kitchen to clean that next.

Eris really seems to be in high spirits; once we get to the kitchen she puts

aside the magic tools for cooking and the pots and pans, and starts to wipe inside the cabinets.

I bet she's trying to scrub every nook and cranny of the storage spaces where spiders are likely to hide.

Eris is crawling on all fours, reaching into the cabinets with the upper half of her body.

However, since she's wiping with a dust cloth in that state, all that ends up being visible to me is her ass shaking.

Yet another outrageous spectacle. A side benefit.

But still, I mustn't look.

Yuel is right next to me. Somehow, she seems to have a lot of free time on her hands.

Does she have nothing better to do? She's completely transfixed on me. As you'd expect, continuing to look at Eris in this situation would be unsavory. I muster my rationality.

"Shiki, could you go change the water in the bucket?"

The ass speaks.

No wait, that was Eris calling out to me with her upper body still enclosed in the storage space.

I can't. This is impossible.

My mind has already been conquered by earthly desires.

Even though she's just cleaning, due to the size difference in Eris' clothes, this feels like some sort of 24-hour Don't Watch Eris Cleaning endurance challenge.

At this rate, my image will...

Yuel's image of me as her honest and pure master is gonna be completely destroyed.

And yet, what should I do?

I'm inevitably going to look. Her panty lines are even showing through.

While go I replace the bucket water, my gaze irresistibly gets drawn to Eris.

"Ah, Master!"

And as I'm carrying the bucket, I suddenly hear Yuel's voice.

I come to my senses and take a look, and there's a dust cloth on the ground where I'm stepping.

But even though she quickly alerts me, my body weight has already shifted onto my leg and I can't stop it.

"W-Whoaaaaah!!"

My foot slips on the soggy dust cloth, and I topple over.

I've lost my balance, and my body is rapidly approaching the ground.

Even so, I learned judo back in my high school days. In class, anyway.

At once, I stick out both hands towards the floor in order to perform a roll, avoiding harm via a magnificent

[body movement](#).

"S-Safe!"

I screwed up by slipping on the dust cloth, but a little thing like that won't beat me.

I have no injuries anywhere; not on my slipped foot, nor my back that I almost slammed onto, nor my hand that was holding the bucket.

Huh, now that I think about it, where the heck did that bucket—

"...How exactly is it safe."

I hear Eris' voice, tinged with anger, coming from right next to me.

When I glance over, there's Eris-san, dripping with water. And an empty bucket tipped over on a flooded floor.

Eris' taut monastic habit clings even closer to her body and turns even further transparent, becoming unbelievably scandalous.

Eris must be embarrassed about it; she's covering her body with her hands as she glares at me uncomfortably.

After glancing at the bucket, the floor, and finally herself, she speaks in a weary tone.

"Ahh, I'm completely soaked.

.....Well, no matter. The rest isn't labor-intensive, so I can handle it by myself. You go spend a little time outside before you come back."

Tossed out by Eris, I walk through the city along with Yuel.

Man, even if she tells me to kill some time, what am I gonna do?

It's not noon yet, and I don't feel like going into the labyrinth either.

Yuel seems happy enough just strolling around idly. Honestly, I bet she'd be fine no matter where we go.

Tavern it is, then. Although it's still early.

I can drink alcohol, plus there's food.

As I'm walking the streets with such things on my mind, I suddenly spot a crowd of people on the road.

"Congratulations on your marriage!"

"Best wishes!"

I can hear blessings coming from that direction.

I take a look when they get close, and walking in the center of it are a woman wearing a wedding dress and a man in a tuxedo-like suit.

"Master, what is that...?"

"Ah, it's the first time you're seeing one, huh Yuel? You see, in this labyrinth city, there's a custom where after they conduct a wedding ceremony, they march around the streets to get blessings from everyone."

I've seen it once before, myself.

They gather their acquaintances and strut along the streets, it's a parade-like thing.

"A marriage, is it?"

Yuel mutters a few words, staring at the bride in her wedding dress.

With a face full of utter happiness, the bride is linking arms with the groom, waving her hand at the pedestrians.

Yuel gazes vacantly at that.

Then she hangs her head slightly and speaks to me.

"Master, what exactly is a marriage?"

How should I know, I've never gotten married either. Besides, I want to create a harem if at all possible.

Ever since I bought Yuel I've been feeling like it will be difficult, but even so, it's not like I've given up.

Although simply not giving up doesn't mean that I know what I'm doing, either.

And yet I can't tell Yuel that, so I'll cover up with something suitable.

"A marriage is a thing where, umm, people who love each other promise to stay together forever. But what form that truly takes differs between each one, I suppose."

"I-I love Master!"

"W-Well, there's no need to be in such a hurry. You'll probably understand in a few years."

Dodging Yuel's question, I head to the tavern.

I have a bad feeling that delving too deeply into this topic will be treading on a land mine.

Taking one last glance at the newlywed couple as I hastily enter the tavern, I take a seat to place my order.

Once I sit down, the chair next to me is suddenly pulled out.

"Yoo-hoo, Shiki. Is it noon already?"

It's Ruruka.

Apparently she was here in the tavern.

Well, it's a little early, but it'll be lunchtime soon enough. Since she expressly



took the seat next to mine, she's no doubt looking to sponge a meal off me. But man, Ruruka's by herself again, huh?

"What happened to your two party members?"

"Ahh, those two... they sometimes act separately. They just have their own circumstances. We're usually together, though."

So they have some sort of circumstances. Is that why she's free to hang around in the tavern?

Well, I'll ignore Ruruka's presence for now and give the waitress my order.

Once I do, Yuel abruptly starts a conversation.

"Umm, Ruruka-san, what do you think of marriage?"

"...Eh? M-Marriage? W-What's with that all of a sudden?"

"Err, umm..."

Ruruka is taken aback by Yuel's outlandish question.

Seems like Ruruka too is wondering why she's asking such a question all of a sudden.

"D-Don't tell me that Shiki's getting married!? W-With who!? It can't be with Yuel-chan, can it!?"

"N-No, no, we simply noticed some people who had just gotten married on our way over here. That's gotten on her mind, probably."

"A-Ahh, so that's what it was. I-I don't have any plans like that at this point, though."

...B-But adventuring isn't a job you can do forever, so I don't think I would mind if it was someone who seemed like he could hold down a steady job?"

Ruruka's answer is, how should I say? Normal.

I thought she'd say she wants to latch onto a sugar daddy, or marry into nobility or something, but unexpectedly it feels like she's thinking typically about her future.

"A-As for me, marriage and stuff is, look, I think slower is better. If you rush into a decision this quickly, you might regret it. Okay? You think so too, right, Shiki?"

When Yuel hears what Ruruka has to say, she grumbles skeptically.

I wonder what's gotten into her?

...By some chance, my "marriage is where you stay together with someone you love" explanation might have made her think about her own present situation.

I do feel fond of Yuel, but in terms of age she can't possibly become a romantic target for me, of course. If she did, that would be disgusting. So much so that I don't want to think too deeply about it.

Did Yuel find the answer within herself? With a single large nod, she tosses the next question at Ruruka.

"...Also, how do I make my boobs bigger?"

"B-Boobs? Err, that's, well... you just gotta eat well and get plenty of exercise. A-Also, milk!"

Another shocker out of nowhere, I wonder where that came from.

...Did she notice me furtively glancing at Eris' chest during the cleaning after all?

It's a misunderstanding.

I wish to inform Yuel that it's a misunderstanding.

She didn't actually misunderstand anything, but it's a misunderstanding.

We finish our meal, and once Yuel downs her 5th glass of milk, we leave the tavern.

I thought about hanging around the tavern for a while, but as soon as Yuel heard what Ruruka had to say, she's been drinking milk ever since.

And boy has she been going at it with gusto.

At the rate she was drinking it, Yuel might have had enough to vomit.

I briefly wondered what was pushing her to go that far, but I bet it was Eris' huge tits.

Having those puppies flaunted in front of her every day, it's inevitable that she would develop a complex.

Well, even if Yuel did have such huge boobs today, I think the imbalance would just make it seem gross.

Although we may have left the tavern, Eris probably hasn't finished cleaning.

Well, there shouldn't be any problem with returning to the hospital now if I behave myself, but when I'm watching Eris' figure as she enthusiastically cleans, I have no confidence that I'll be able to behave.

Guess we should take a meandering stroll to help with digestion and kill some time.

As we're doing exactly that, I notice Yuel staring at something.

She's gazing at something with sparkling eyes of anticipation.

I look in that direction, and there's a large building with a dragon and sword billboard on it.

"A theater?"

I take a closer look at the sign, and it seems they're putting on a popular action-adventure play of the fight between the legendary hero and the evil god.

There are any number of theaters like this one within the city.

They're places where the actors use props, music, and magic to put on an engaging play.

Having said that, other than the fact that there's magic, they're not really any different from the theaters in Japan.

You pay a reasonable price for admission and watch a play; it's treated as a standard date spot.

Well, the theaters I know of are the ones Geyser told me about which are more like strip clubs, though.

I wanna go sometime.

"You wanna go in?"

When I try asking Yuel, she nods gladly.

Looks like she genuinely wanted to watch a play.

I pay the fee and head inside, and it looks like the play is just about to begin; a smattering of guests are already seated.

As we're walking to find a suitable location to sit... suddenly, I spot some familiar faces.

A duo of a tall bespectacled man and a short ruffian-type guy...

They're very familiar indeed.

It's kinda sad seeing two men lined up together at a theater.

I wonder why they're in a place like this.

As I'm looking at them strangely, I suddenly meet eyes with the ruffian guy.

"Oh, if it ain't Shiki!"

"Eh, Shiki? Whaaat, so Shiki came too? Whatta coincidence."

Yep, it's Eight and Geyser.

Even though all of the nearby groups of customers are couples, this spot alone is excessively miserable.

It's mostly Geyser's fault, though.

"...Why are two men here by themselves in a place like this."

"D-Don't say that to us."

"Ain't our fault. One of our buddies told us his seats were too empty and we should come."

In other words, they're shills? Looks like theaters have it tough too.

Well, the more I look around this theater, the more I get the feeling that it's not making much money. It's probably a new theater that hasn't been around for long.

"Umm, Eight-san and Geyser-san, what do you think of marriage?"

While I'm reflecting on that, Yuel asks that question again.

...She's so pure.

And given her purity, she doesn't assume that two guys who'd come to the theater together couldn't possibly have girlfriends or spouses.

Since Eight and Geyser give me a glance that asks what brought that on so suddenly, I explain the events that led up to this.

After I do, the two exchange glances...

"...We don't"

"...got nobody to marry."

and mumble that in the tiniest of voices.

Somehow, Eight and Geyser's backs seem one size smaller now.

The play was about the typical righteous fare.

The summoned hero assembled a party and struck down the evil god who had been resurrected from the depths of the earth. Simply put, that's all it was.

Frankly, the acting was stiff; I can understand why the audience was so sparse. And Geyser even fell asleep.

Well, Yuel seems satisfied, so I guess it's fine. Although I'm a little worried about how she was talking to Eight and Geyser about something just before we left the theater. Still, we managed to kill a lot of time.

Eris is probably finished with the cleaning by now.

Let's return to the hospital soon.

When we get back to the hospital, Eris has finished cleaning and is preparing to make dinner.

I could probably search the house and not find a single spider corpse anywhere now.

That's how much the hospital has been polished up.

Yuel rushes over to Eris and asks that question.

"Eris-san, what do you think of marriage?"

For a moment, Eris makes an expression like there's a question mark floating above her head, but once I clarify, she instantly tilts her head contemplatively.

"Marriage, hmm."

Eris becomes a little uneasy, and glances at me.

What's with that look? Does she see me as a romantic target?

Well, we're living under a single roof, so perhaps it's like we're already married.

I bet it's just a matter of time before she falls for my coolness.

The established facts are steadily piling up. Sooner or later the day may come when Eris allows me into her bed. Maybe she'll even laugh it off if I feel up her tits a bit. My blinding delusions are expanding.

And, as I'm imagining such things—

".....Hahhh"

Watching my face, Eris makes a deep sigh.

Whoa, she seems displeased.

I guess it was my misunderstanding. But then I wonder what that look I saw earlier was?

I want to believe that it's nothing like she can't get married since I'm living here.

No, I've never seen Eris hanging around with men, so at least in that respect it definitely shouldn't be the case.

However, as if only to say that she doesn't want to speak of it any further, Eris just lightly pats Yuel's head.

"A-Also... how can I make my boobs big like yours, Eris-san?"

Again, she asks the same question she put to Ruruka. Although she seems more passionate about it this time than she did with Ruruka.

"Yuel-chan, it's alright, you have plenty of time to grow."

And yet the persuasive power of Eris' words, when she was wearing clothes

that size at age 14, is pretty much nil.

Then, that night.

As Yuel's getting into bed with me, she murmurs in a whisper.

"Master, it seems that boobs get bigger when men rub them."

...I see something move.

Sleeping in the next bed over, Eris' shoulders twitch. No doubt about it, she's listening in.

"That kind of thing is unfounded nonsense. Who the heck told you that?"

As far as I can remember, neither Ruruka nor Eris said anything like that.

Supposing it was Geyser?

That guy is always inspiring me to do truly unscrupulous things.

"My senpai waitress-san told me she was having her boyfriend rub them."

That's who it was? I wonder just which waitress-san it was?

I don't really want to ask.

But I want to know who said it.

Some rather complex feelings are bubbling up.

Hold on, it seems I accused Geyser of false charges. I'll apologize to him within my heart.

"Also, Geyser-san said the same thing at the theater."

"Yuel, that was a lie. Don't believe him."

I want my good faith back for apologizing to him internally.

Geyser is Geyser, after all. He wouldn't do anything decent.

"Master, I have been thinking about marriage all day today."

I know that.

If she goes that far to ask about marriage over and over, there's no way I wouldn't know.

"But, I, I don't understand marriage very well. Since I can stay with Master forever even if we aren't married."

There are differences between a master-and-slave employment relationship and a marriage, though.

Well, that could mean she doesn't feel anything special over the fact that we're together now.

It's natural for us to be together, you could look at it that way.

And she's still a slave, so maybe she's poorly informed about such things.

Man, I'm glad Yuel didn't tell me she wanted to get married or anything.

If something like that happened, it seems like either answer would turn out unpleasant for me.

"I am totally content with things the way they are. So, if Master will allow it, I want to come along with Master wherever you go."

Well, even if I do get married to someone, I wouldn't throw Yuel away.

Besides, since my objective is a harem, rather than getting married to that special someone, I want to be surrounded by girls.

"Forever... wherever..."

Yuel closes her eyes and grabs my clothes.

While making a sort of anxious-looking expression.

...Yuel's unnatural attitude today.

By some chance, maybe she's afraid that when I get married to someone, our relationship will change.

I wonder if I should say something to give Yuel some peace of mind as well?

As I'm mulling over what I should tell Yuel, suddenly, I spot something move slightly over Yuel's shoulder.

When I glance over, I meet eyes with Eris looking back at me.

Perhaps not expecting that our eyes would meet, Eris immediately turns her head away.



It's dark so I can't see her expression clearly, but it looks like she completely overheard our conversation.

What do I do?

I need to say something suitable to clear up Yuel's feelings while not harming Eris' impression of me. Moreover, Yuel's expression was serious.

It's not like I can joke around too much.

But man, what should I say at a time like this...

As I'm contemplating it, before I notice, Yuel is drawing a sleeping breath.

I don't know what Yuel was actually thinking about today, or what she felt when she saw that married bride.

But there was a certain amount of weight to Yuel's "I want to be together forever" declaration.

So long as I don't reject her, come hell or high water, she'll follow me no matter what happens. That's the impression I felt from that line.

Well, I have no plans to go through hell and high water, though.

As I observe Yuel's gentle sleeping face, I softly pet her head so as not to wake her.